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THE SHELF

*A COMEDY MORE OR LESS POLITE
IN THREE ACTS*

BY
DORRANCE DAVIS

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THE SHELF

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The following is a copy of program of the first performance of "THE SHELF," as presented at the Morosco Theatre, New York, N. Y., week beginning Monday evening, September 27, 1926:

WILLIAM B. FRIEDLANDER

Presents

"THE SHELF"

A Comedy Drama in Three Acts

Cast of Characters

STANLEY RISDALE	Louis Kimball
EMMA SMITH	Jessie Ralph
MRS. CHETSWOLD	Leah Winslow
MISS BATTERSON	Thelma Ritter
JOHN WENDHAM	Frederick Truesdell
CAROLINE WENDHAM	Lee Patrick
STELLA AMARANTH	Frances Starr
BALDWIN CUSTARD	Lawrence Leslie
U. S. SENATOR RISDALE	Arthur Byron
THE REV. HERBERT CHETSWOLD.....	Donald Meek

ACT I. *The sun parlor of John Wendham's Home.
Saturday morning.*

ACT II. *The same. Late the same afternoon.*

ACT III. *The same. Four days later. Nine-thirty in
the evening.*

TIME: *June.*

PLACE: *Kiwanisport. A city of fifteen thousand inhabitants in any State of the Union the fancy suggests.*

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(In the order in which they appear)

STANLEY RISDALE, *the Senator's son.*
EMMA SMITH, *the Wendham's middle-aged maid.*
MRS. CHETSWOLD, *the minister's wife.*
MISS BATTERSON, *a respectable maiden lady.*
JOHN WENDHAM.
CAROLINE WENDHAM, *his daughter.*
STELLA AMARANTH.
BALDWIN CUSTARD.
U. S. SENATOR RISDALE, *Stanley's father.*
REVEREND HERBERT CHETSWOLD.

SCENE: *The sun parlor of John Wendham's home in
Kiwanisport.*

ACT I. *Saturday morning.*

ACT II. *Late the same afternoon.*

ACT III. *Four days later—nine-thirty in the evening.*

TIME: *June.*

PLACE: *Kiwanisport, a city of fifteen thousand inhabitants, in any State of the Union the fancy suggests.*

THE SHELF

ACT I

SCENE: *The sun-parlor of John Wendham's house in Kiwanisport. A bright, hot morning in June.*

The room has a tiled floor. The smart wicker furniture is upholstered in gay flowered chintz. The side walls are cement plaster, over which is lattice work. Set in the side walls are high glass doors and one gets a glimpse through them of the leafy landscape outside.

At the back up Right is a door leading out into the garden, with trees and landscape in the distance. Down Right is a telephone setting before a settee and table. Left of settee is a chair. In Center is a large fan-shaped chair. Left of this chair is another smaller chair, U.R. of this table. Running up and down stage Left is a settee, the like of which is on stage Right.

In the hall a flight of stairs through an arch leads to the chambers above.

There is a door called U.U.R. that is R. of staircase that leads off to the library and maid's entrance. Down staircase and in arch is an exit Left.

On the wall center of staircase is hanging an oil painting. On the Left wall a mirror is hanging.

The stage is generally dressed to give the appearance of a very comfortable and luxurious summer porch.

AT RISE: CAROLINE and STANLEY are off Right in the garden, arguing.

EMMA enters U.U.C., singing some old song and carrying a bowl of flowers that she sets on table U.L. and exits U.U.L., still singing.

(CAROLINE and STANLEY, off stage.)

STANLEY. Please—Caroline—be reasonable! Let up, can't you? You've been picking on me all morning!

CAROLINE. You deserve it!—You made me feel cheap in front of everybody, Stanley Risdale—

STANLEY. Aw, you're acting like a regular baby!

CAROLINE. (*Furiously*) A baby, am I?—Well, if you are so fond of maturity, why don't you go in the house and do some more flirting with Mrs. Amaranth?

STANLEY. All right—I will—gladly!—since you insist on it. Thanks for the suggestion.

About this time STANLEY and CAROLINE are about fed up with each other, and STANLEY enters U.R., carrying the woe of a battle of love. He crosses to D.L., then back to U.R.; looks off in the garden, sulks back to chair C., picks up newspaper on hour-glass table; sits in chair and tries to read.

EMMA enters again U.U.C., this time carrying a few ash-receivers to place around the room, for she has just completed her morning dusting. She crosses D.L. As she places a receiver on the D.L. table, STANLEY yelps, for she is still singing.

STANLEY. (*With an irritated start*) Stop that! Can't you?

EMMA. (*Stops singing abruptly and wheels around on him*) My heavens . . . Stanley Risdale—how you scared me! Is that any way to talk to a lady?

STANLEY. (*Moodily*) It's the way most ladies deserve to be talked to.

EMMA. Oh, indeed? Is *that* the way you're feeling? (*He rattles the newspaper. EMMA takes a step to him*) What are you doing in here, anyway? I thought you were outdoors with Miss Caroline.

STANLEY. Caroline's got a nasty grouch on. (*Resumes reading.*)

EMMA. A grouch, hey? Humph! No wonder! After the didoes *you* cut up last night—what else did you expect?

STANLEY. (*Slamming down the paper and getting up, exasperated*) Good Lord—are you going to commence *too*?

EMMA. (*Loftily, crosses front of him to door R.*) Not me . . . ! I mind my own business. (D.R.C.) Just the same, I know, if I had a fiance that kissed a grass widder in a public place,—and then, on top of that, climbed into a closed car with her, and stayed there in the dark for an hour—*well* . . .

STANLEY. *Well?*—What?

EMMA. The gentleman would hear something out of me to his disadvantage.

STANLEY. Say! . . . Who told *you* all this? I didn't see you at the church festival last night.

EMMA. (*Crossing to c. chair, picks up and arranges newspaper*) I wasn't there, *but* I heard *all* about it.

STANLEY. From whom?

EMMA. (*With relish*) Everybody! !—The whole town is *buzzing* with it!

STANLEY. (*With a groan*) Wouldn't you know!

EMMA. (*Drops D.C. to tell it to him*) There ain't been so much popular indignation in *years*!—Huh!

Leave it to that Amaranth woman to start a scandal going.

STANLEY. (*With dignity*) That is no way for you to refer to Mrs. Amaranth, Emma.

EMMA. And why not?

STANLEY. You might remember that Mrs. Amaranth happens to be a member of the family, Caroline's own aunt—and in addition to that she is a guest in this house.

EMMA. Nobody asked her here—she invited herself—and she's made more trouble in the four weeks since she's been here—her and her Paris habits—

STANLEY. (*Rises and with force goes c. to EMMA*) For your information, she got into my car last night merely to escape the rain.

EMMA. (*Sarcastically*) Oh! . . . I see . . .

STANLEY. I'm glad you do. It's encouraging to think that *somebody* does. (*Leaves her and crosses D.L.*)

EMMA. Oh, I'm so glad.

STANLEY. (*Turning on her again*) Furthermore—the *kisses* you referred to were a purely commercial proposition.

EMMA. (*With a guffaw*) Ah!—Try to get anybody to believe *that*.

(*Doorbell gives two or three rings.*)

EMMA. (*Triumphantly*) Ha . . . ha!—I thought so!

STANLEY. What did you think?

EMMA. The scandal's started! . . . and if that there doorbell don't mean trouble—well, my name ain't Emma Smith! (*Crosses and through arch to exit L.*)

(*STANLEY crosses to c., picks up newspaper—goes back down L. with it and sits, covering himself*

with paper, unobserved, reading. EMMA arrives at outer door, using time to get there, opens door, revealing MRS. CHETSWOLD and MISS BATTERSON.)

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Off, at door as it opens*) Good morning, Emma.

EMMA. (*Effusively, becoming at once the hostess*) Why! Good morning, Mrs. Chetswold . . . and here's Miss Batterson, too. My! Come on in out the hot sun.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*As they are coming in, entering the hall*) Thank you, Emma. Is Mrs. Amaranth at home?

EMMA. Oh, yes, ma'm; yes, indeed, very much at home. (*They have entered and are now visible in the arch.*)

(MRS. CHETSWOLD is the first to enter, EMMA follows, then MISS BATTERSON bringing up the rear. EMMA is R.C. in arch, MRS. CHETSWOLD C. and MISS BATTERSON is L.)

(MRS. CHETSWOLD is an ultra-refined, terribly genteel female, in her late forties. She dresses severely, with a righteous contempt for the indecencies of present-day fashions. Her utterance is habitually sweet—almost honeyed. She has a ready, professional smile, which just misses being entirely convincing, and alas!—in spite of her practised sugary demeanor, there hovers around the lady a subtle aura of cattishness.)

(MISS BATTERSON is, though young, a middle-aged looking, pensive, romantic maiden, small, meek and timid. She has a quaint air of faded girlhood about her, and several coquettish touches in her neat and dainty attire would indicate that she has not altogether abandoned

the hope of attracting masculine attention. Miss BATTERSON is nervously ill at ease and mildly resentful of having been roped into the present situation.)

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Will you tell Mrs. Amaranth, Emma, we are here to see her on a personal matter?

STANLEY. (*Without moving from behind his paper*) You might mention that I am here too, Emma.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Hearing his voice, comes D.L. of C. chair, talking*) Why, Stanley, my boy!—Good morning. (*MISS BATTERSON crosses around and down to sit in chair R. of STANLEY. EMMA has followed easily down and is now Left of C. chair.*)

STANLEY. (*Grumpily*) Morning.

MISS BATTERSON. And so you are waiting to see Mrs. Amaranth, too, Stanley. (*And setting a chair a bit D.R., she sits, continuing*) Isn't that a coincidence?

STANLEY. Yeah—any objections?

MISS BATTERSON. (*Hastily and abashed*) Oh, no, no, not at all!

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Well . . . I suppose everybody knows his own business best—

STANLEY. That's a surprising admission . . . coming from you, Mrs. Chetswold. (*MRS. CHETSWOLD glares.*)

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Don't be saucy, Stanley dear. Aren't you paying your respects to our local Siren rather early in the day?

STANLEY. (*Shortly*) It's after eleven o'clock.

EMMA. Well, even if it is . . . you haven't got a chance to see her. She ain't even out of bed yet.

MRS. BATTERSON. Still in bed—at *this* hour—my, what truly continental luxury!

(*Buzzer rings once.*)

EMMA. That's Mrs. Amaranth *now*. She wants her breakfast—and there she'll *lay* until I bring it up to her.

MISS BATTERSON. (*With great interest*) Breakfast in bed!—I never supposed it really happened, outside of a novel!

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Such habits remind one of the decadent practises of pagan Rome.

EMMA. Huh! *She's* got it all over the Romans! You ladies don't know the half of it!

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*With a slight shudder*) We know quite enough, Emma. And what we don't know, we suspect!

EMMA. (*Nodding her head in agreement*) Same here, ma'am. Ain't it *queer* what intuitions us virtuous women has?

STANLEY. I'll say so. *Queer* is the word! (*They all register on him.*)

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Will you say to Mrs. Amaranth, Emma, that we are waiting, and that we will detain her only a few minutes?

EMMA. Sure, ma'am—right away.

STANLEY. Perhaps I'd better come back later.

EMMA. (*A step to STANLEY*) Perhaps you had. That'll give her a chance to put her war paint on. (*A step Right, to ladies—and in position to exit L. of c. chair*) She's got a special make-up for callers that wears pants.

STANLEY. (*Leaps to his feet and follows EMMA to arch, calling after her. MRS. CHETSWOLD sits*) Oh, is that so? (*EMMA tosses her head and goes up stairs. STANLEY looks after her a pause, then sulkily comes down c.*) What's the matter with everybody? Even Emma's getting catty. (*MRS. CHETSWOLD shrugs.*) Well, I guess I'll run along. Bye-bye. (*Starts to go U.*)

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Stanley . . . Just a moment, please . . .

STANLEY. (*Stops*) What?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. I want to speak to you. (STANLEY *comes* D.C.) Will you forgive me, Stanley, as a well-meaning friend, if I ask you a personal question?—and will you answer it candidly and truthfully?

STANLEY. I don't know. . . . What is it?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Are you becoming infatuated with that woman upstairs?

STANLEY. (*Irritated and embarrassed*) Why . . . No! . . . Hang it, I don't know whether I am or not. I never thought of such a thing!

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Then *please*, my dear, for your own sake, do some careful thinking and convince yourself that you are not. She is a dangerous person—— And people are talking!

STANLEY. Aw . . . What do I care? (EMMA *starts in over stairs*.) I guess I can take care of myself. (*Starts to leave, going U.R. of c. chair*.)

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Not convinced*) Let us hope so.

EMMA. (*Has landed on stage C.D.L. of c. chair*) She's just out o' bed, ma'am—and she says if you'll wait she'll have her coffee down here.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Very kind of her, I'm sure!

STANLEY. (*Eagerly coming to c.*) How about me?—Any message?

EMMA. Yes.—You can come back later, and if you're a good boy, and not make love to her, she may take a ride with you in your new car.

STANLEY. (*Bubbling over*) Great! (*Rushes over to EMMA, puts his hands on her shoulders and all but embraces her. He would, only she wiggles out of it.*) I'll be here. (*Rushing U.C.*) Bye-bye! (*He stops, noticing newspaper still in his hand; comes down, puts it on hour-glass table R. of c. chair, talking as he does*) Not my paper. . . . So long, Mrs. Chetswold. . . . Bye-bye. (*And he flies out*)

U.R. in high spirit, singing: "I love my baby, my baby loves me. There is nobody as happy as me." And by this time his voice trails off in the distance. The ladies are gazing after him, EMMA pursing her lips and the other ladies shaking their heads.)

EMMA. (*Breaking the pause*) Ain't it the limit? . . . So he's got it too.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Got what?

(BUZZER.)

EMMA. The fever, for that dame upstairs. . . . What is there about her that makes all the men act like a lot of *tom cats*?

MISS BATTERSON. I'd give anything to find out. (*They all register on her.*) . . . er . . . just as a matter of information, I mean.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Well, I can't enlighten you! The secret of her attraction is outside of my experience.

EMMA. (*Looking her over sympathetically*) Yes, ma'am, I guess it is.

MISS BATTERSON. She's really very pretty—perhaps that's it.

EMMA. (*Grudgingly*) She ain't so bad, when she's all fixed up. (*To MRS. CHETSWOLD*) But looks ain't all! . . . No, ma'am! She's got something else.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Yes, and I fancy I know what it is.

MISS BATTERSON. Oh, do you?

EMMA. Do tell! (*The women are leaning forward and waiting on the word.*)

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Lowering her voice to a shocked undertone*) I don't wish to do this woman an injustice—but—I am certain that Mrs. Amaranth possesses that dreadful modern development called *sex appeal*! !

EMMA. (*Horrified but thrilled*) Oh, the hussy!

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Grimly*) Exactly!—Hussy

is the old-fashioned name for it. . . . (*They all nod "yes."*) But something must be done to save our decent men.

MISS BATTERSON. (*Plaintively*) Yes, it really doesn't seem fair to the rest of us. A personality like that let *loose* in our fair city.

(*Buzzer rings twice.*)

EMMA. Drat that woman! ! !—This time it's her bath, I suppose.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Scandalized*) Good heavens! —Do you have to give her a *bath*, too?

EMMA. (*Tartly*) Almost. (*To MISS BATTERSON in a tense whisper fraught with dark meaning*) She uses a whole bottle of *perfumery* in it!

MISS BATTERSON. (*In pleased horror*) Mercy! !

EMMA. (*To MRS. CHETSWOLD with fearful relish*) Yes, ma'am—*French* *perfumery*, too!

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Every hideous suspicion now confirmed*) Worse and worse! !

EMMA. Ain't it *scandalous*? I give you my word, Mrs. Chetswold, every time I get a *whiff* of it, it makes me feel *fast*! !

MISS BATTERSON. (*In deep thought*) I wonder where she buys it?

EMMA. (*Now assured of a sympathetic audience*) Fifteen years I've kept house for the Wendhams; took care of them ever since Miss Caroline's poor mother died. This is the only home I've got, but I give you my word, if I thought that woman was going to stay here, for good, I'd quit *cold*!

MRS. CHETSWOLD. And no one could blame you. She is a bad example for any pure-minded female to have around her.

EMMA. Ain't it so . . . Heaven *knows* the terrible struggle I've always had to be pure-minded—but—*she's* put a *lot* of ideas into my head.

MISS BATTERSON. (*Nodding to express comprehension*) I can just imagine.

(*Buzzer rings again insistently.*)

EMMA. (*With a jump, exasperated*) Damn that bell!—Oh, Lord, excuse me, ma'am—I mean heaven give me fortitude.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. *Amen!*

(*EMMA rushes out up over stairs. MRS. CHETSWOLD rises, takes newspaper from hour-glass table R. of C. Sits again and reads on the front page. MISS BATTERSON fidgets nervously, uneasy.*)

MISS BATTERSON. Oh, dear . . . I'm so nervous!

MRS. CHETSWOLD. What about?

MISS BATTERSON. It always upsets me to hear anybody scolded—I wish I hadn't come.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. It was your *duty* to come, after the ladies appointed you.

MISS BATTERSON. I'd just as soon they'd appointed someone else.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Without looking from the paper*) We felt it was wiser to have an *unmarried* woman on the committee.

MISS BATTERSON. Well, I only hope that you won't go discussing things with Mrs. Amaranth that an unmarried woman ought not to hear. (*MRS. CHETSWOLD is about to tell her plenty when they hear CAROLINE and WENDHAM off stage R.*)

WENDHAM. Now, Caroline, you're all wrong about your Aunt Stella.

CAROLINE. (*Flaring*) Oh!—You're always defending her.—You think she's just perfection, don't you?

WENDHAM. I like her,—yes.

CAROLINE. Well, I don't.—I wish she'd go away.

WENDHAM. Now, now, *now* . . .

CAROLINE. I warn you, Father, I won't stand much more! (*She has now come into view, still in garden.*)

WENDHAM. Caroline, please cool down.—Don't go making mountains out of mole-hills. . . .

CAROLINE. (*U.R. garden door, angrily*) I—— (*She sees the guests and changes her tone. CAROLINE is pretty, spoiled, petulant, and twenty-one.*) Why, good morning. (*Going to MRS. CHETSWOLD, R. of her*) Emma didn't tell us——

MRS. CHETSWOLD. We didn't wish to disturb you.

CAROLINE. Oh, I see. (*WENDHAM enters U.R.*)

(*WENDHAM is a good-natured, easy-going, florid man, past fifty, with prematurely white hair. He is dressed in a light colored Palm Beach suit and has a rose in his lapel.*)

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Good morning, Mr. Wendham. (*CAROLINE goes L. to greet MISS BATTERSON.*)

WENDHAM. (*Follows D. to the ladies as CAROLINE leaves*) How do you do, ladies? Glad to see you. (*Turns L. to MISS BATTERSON. Crosses to her. She comes in a step and they meet in front of her chair. Then MRS. CHETSWOLD talks as he shakes MISS BATTERSON'S hand and they exchange a "Glad to see you" and "Hello." CAROLINE has followed through and is sitting D.L.*)

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Oh, Mr. Wendham . . . (*He turns to her and steps L. of C. chair.*) I was just reading about the State Park Bill. Everyone is so anxious—— Do you happen to know if the Governor intends to sign it?

WENDHAM. Humph!—He'd better, or Risdale will scalp him.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. I don't think it would be pleasant to oppose dear Senator Risdale—a man of *iron*—isn't he?

MISS BATTERSON. And one would hate to see the Governor scalped—he's *such* a handsome man!—Don't you think so, Mr. Wendham?

WENDHAM. I'm not much of a judge of masculine beauty. . . . Hot, isn't it?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Fanning herself with the paper*) *Very*—I had hoped the thunderstorm last night would cool things off—but it hasn't.

WENDHAM. Did the storm interfere with your moonlight garden party?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. It *did* . . . naturally.

WENDHAM. Too bad!—Were you successful financially?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Yes.—We realized quite a tidy sum towards the new organ. (*Icily*) Thanks chiefly, —to Mrs. Amaranth.

WENDHAM. (*Suspiciously*) You sound as though Stella had been up to something—— What did she do?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Haven't you told him, Caroline?

CAROLINE. No.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Mrs. Amaranth insisted upon taking charge of the iced tea booth, and with each glass of tea she sold a kiss to the men for a *dollar apiece*.

WENDHAM. (*In mock horror—secretly amused*) Good Lord! Why—how *outrageous*!

MISS BATTERSON. Oh, it was far worse than *that*! She charged the *married* men *two* dollars.

WENDHAM. You don't tell me! And did the married men submit to such unfair discrimination?

MISS BATTERSON. *Did they?* They crowded the younger men quite away from the booth.

WENDHAM. Dear, dear, this is appalling! (*Comes around to sit c. chair*) How much did she take in?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Two hundred and forty-six dollars!

WENDHAM. Whew! She *must* have had a busy evening.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. The figures speak for themselves.

WENDHAM. But did the Reverend Chetswold countenance such a performance?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. My husband spent *eight dollars* last night on iced tea—— Money we could ill afford. You can draw your own conclusions!

WENDHAM. Under the circumstances, I'd rather not draw *any*.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. As a matter of fact, all the ladies of the congregation are thoroughly aroused. They have decided—(*EMMA starts in over stairs*)—that Mrs. Amaranth must be disciplined. That is why we are here!

(*EMMA enters through arch; comes D.L. of c. chair and while reading, sets flower bowl on table L. that she may easily place coffee tray on table for her next entrance.*)

EMMA. She's all dressed and she'll be right down, Mrs. Chetswold.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Thank you, Emma. (*EMMA exits in arch R.*)

WENDHAM. (*Rises, slightly dismayed*) I think I'll keep out of this, if you'll excuse me. (*Takes a step to MRS. CHETSWOLD that he can cross U.R. of c. chair.*)

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Certainly . . . there is no occasion for you to be annoyed.

WENDHAM. Don't be too hard on Stella, Mrs. Chetswold—I am certain she meant well. You see . . . she has spent most of her life in Europe and she isn't used to our American conventionality— She is really a good sort, and I assure you her bark is worse than her bite.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Possibly it is . . . all we ask of Mrs. Amaranth is that she—(*STELLA is now seen descending the stairs. She overhears MRS. CHETSWOLD'S remarks and chuckles to herself in amusement.*)—cease barking at, or biting other people's husbands.

WENDHAM. (*With an easy turn U. to avoid further conversation, he sees STELLA at bottom step*) Ah!— Here's Stella now! (*He salutes her with a sort of apprehensive gaiety, goes U.R. of her, takes her hand. CAROLINE remains seated, other ladies look, then rise. Holding look on her*) Good morning, Stella. . . Company to see you! I'm off— Excuse me?

(*Exits hastily U.R. STELLA glides D.L. of C. chair and into the room, looking charming in a most becoming if rather daring peignoir. If MRS. AMARANTH is forty she doesn't look it, and it is nobody's business. She is pretty and graceful and conveys without consciousness the fact that she is a thoroughly well-bred woman of the world. Her greatest fault is a fatal desire to please. She likes to see people happy, and will always put herself out to try to make them so. This amiable ambition has been the cause of much trouble to her. Men invariably regard her with enthusiasm, women, with dark suspicion.*)

STELLA. (*With no sign of having overheard the conversation. To all*) Good morning—or is it

afternoon? (*Crossing R.*) Dear Mrs. Chetswold . . . and—*of course*—Miss Batterson. . . . (*Going D.L. to MISS BATTERSON, who returns her offered hand more warmly.*) How sweet of you all to look in on me so *frightfully* early!

MRS. CHETSWOLD. *Early?*

STELLA. (*D.L.*) Well . . . early for me—I suppose one ought to get up with the *Roosters*, or is it the *Hens* that start to *cackle* so hideously at dawn? (*Glides to sit in chair c.*) You see, I'm so *shockingly* ignorant of rural manners and customs! (*She sinks into chair and poses gracefully with a deliberate display of leg. MISS BATTERSON gazes fascinated on the exposure of limb, assuring herself that the hosiery is really silk, and horribly expensive. MRS. CHETSWOLD regards the ankle as though it were a rattlesnake, then turns her eyes away, with a shudder of outraged decency.*) Do you know, my dears . . . Oh, do sit down. . . . Do you know—(*They sit.*)—I was simply worn out after last night's exertions?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. I'm not at all surprised to hear it!

STELLA. And how is dear Doctor Chetswold?—did he sleep well?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Shortly*) No—he did not!

STELLA. Oh!—so sorry—I hope it wasn't tactless to inquire?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Not at all—why *should* it be?

STELLA. (*Blankly*) I don't know.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Last evening my husband very foolishly chilled his interior with *iced tea*. (*She hisses the terrible words*) And all night long, I was obliged to keep a hot water bottle on his *Solar Plexus*!

STELLA. (*Sympathetically*) What a pity—and how *stupid* that must have been for you. I fancy the dear man overdid things.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. *I am quite sure he did.*

STELLA. He had *such* an exciting evening—
He was simply *killing*. I never knew a clergyman
could have so much fun in him.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. *Neither did I.*

(CAROLINE rises, starts hastily U.C. Stops L. of c.
chair as STELLA speaks.)

STELLA. Carrie, dear, where are you off to?

CAROLINE. I'm going out into the garden.

STELLA. And eat worms? My dear, I *do* hope
you are not still peevish at me?

CAROLINE. (*Coldly*) I haven't been peevish—
that I know of.

STELLA. Now don't fib, you foolish child! You
were furious at me last night because I dragged
poor Stanley into that car. I *knew* I'd be talked
about. The women's eyes were boring into my back
like so many gimlets, but it was pouring rain. I am
peculiar, I suppose, but I'd rather be compromised
than soaked to the skin—*any time!*

CAROLINE. Yes; I imagine *you would*. But you
are mistaken about *me*. I am utterly indifferent to
what Stanley Risdale does. Excuse me! (*Crosses
around U. of c. chair to U.R. settee.*)

STELLA. (*Rising and crossing to R.U. of c. chair*)
Please don't go.

CAROLINE. Why do you wish me to stay?

STELLA. Because I know these dear, thoughtful
friends have called to embarrass me with gratitude
for all I did last night—for the *organ!*—and I don't
want to be thanked. It was a *pleasure!*

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Angrily*) Why, I hadn't . . .

STELLA. Really it was—I *enjoyed* doing it.

MISS BATTERSON. (*With a reminiscent sigh*)
Well, you certainly *seemed* to.

STELLA. (*To MISS BATTERSON*) Did you notice

it, too?—I'd have made so much more money if the horrid thunderstorm hadn't interrupted us . . . (To MRS. CHETSWOLD) The line was forming again, but I couldn't go on—the lightning took my mind off what I was doing.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. We ladies think you did *quite enough*.

STELLA. Do you really?—But then, you dear sweet things appear to be so *modest* in your demands. (CAROLINE *huffs and goes to U.R. door.*) Caroline . . . if you just sit down and chat with us, I promise to be absolutely *icy* to your boy friend in the future——

(EMMA *enters U.U.R. with a tray containing STELLA'S coffee and a pile of envelopes, setting tray on table U.L.*)

CAROLINE. Oh, please don't let me interfere between you! (*Flounces out through garden door.*)

STELLA. (*Dropping D. front of C. chair*) Naughty, jealous child! Why *will* she act so?

EMMA. (*Has set tray on table*) Here's your breakfast, ma'am. (*Crosses to STELLA*) And the mail.

(STELLA *takes it. EMMA proceeds to U.L., where breakfast table is setting; brings it to L. of C. chair, then brings tray with coffee service and sets it on table. STELLA runs through mail as she talks, then tosses it all, unopened, impatiently on hour-glass table; then sits.*)

STELLA. Thank you, Emma. *Do* have some coffee with me, won't you? Emma can bring some cups——

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Frigidly*) Thank you—*no*.

(MISS BATTERSON is dying to have some. EMMA has now finished setting the service and is L. of STELLA.)

STELLA. How about you, Miss Batterson?

MISS BATTERSON. Why, I wouldn't . . . (*And as she opens her mouth MRS. CHETSWOLD glares the words out of her and she changes the thought*) . . . er really care for any.

STELLA. Sorry. That will be all, Emma.

EMMA. Very good, ma'am. (*Exits U.U.R.*)

(*The ladies brace themselves for the conflict.*

STELLA coolly flirts a napkin and pours her coffee.)

STELLA. I feel rather piggish eating all by myself—I always like to share things with others . . . (*Looks genially at MRS. CHETSWOLD*) Don't you?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Within reason, yes. But I object to sharing my husband with anybody, Mrs. Amaranth!

STELLA. (*Astonished*) Why—what in the world do you mean?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Your behavior last evening makes it necessary to remind you that I am married to the Reverend Herbert Chetswold.

STELLA. Surely, no one doubts that? (*Looks inquiringly to MISS BATTERSON*) Do they?

MISS BATTERSON. (*Confused and thrown off her guard at the direct question*) What . . . er . . . oh . . . yes. . . . I mean no . . . er—I don't think so. I mean, well, I don't . . . (*Then to MRS. CHETSWOLD*) Well, do they?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*With a baleful glare to MISS BATTERSON*) Well, I hope not—— (*To STELLA*) At all events, after putting up with Dr. Chetswold

and waiting on him hand and foot for twenty-two years, I don't propose—whatever his deficiencies—to sit tamely still and let another woman lure him away from me.

STELLA. But my dear woman . . . why should I?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. I don't know. I can't see why *anybody* else should want him. However, the fact remains that *you* have succeeded in arousing emotions in my husband, which *I* had every reason to believe were *extinct*!

STELLA. (*Places her cup back on tray from which she has been drinking, amused under the inference*) I deny it.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Which are you denying—his emotions or your efforts?

STELLA. *Both!*

MRS. CHETSWOLD. You can't get out of it by denials—I know what I am talking about.

STELLA. Well, I'm sure I don't.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Oh, yes, you *do*, Mrs. Amaranth. Now *what* satisfaction does it give you to do such things?

STELLA. What things?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Coming here to our peaceful, respectable town, and deliberately upsetting our Christian men with your *sex appeal*?

STELLA. My *word*!—Have I done that?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. You have, and you know it, and the ladies of the Social Circle know and resent it. They held a meeting this morning, and it was decided unanimously that *you* are not a desirable person to know!

STELLA. (*Sweetly*) Dear me, how dreadful! And having come to that regrettable conclusion, **what** do the ladies intend to do about it?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. They demand that you cease

to ogle and flirt with their husbands, otherwise they will compel the Reverend Chetswold to ask you not to worship at St. Micah's Church in the future.

STELLA. Well, if you've decided that I am a wicked woman, why do you want me to keep out of your church? I always imagined the church was a refuge for sinners.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. *You are entirely mistaken. . . .* The church is a sanctuary for the saved.

STELLA. *(Half amused)* Oh, . . . I see,—a sort of close corporation of Pharisees, eh? I'm glad to know that. It gives me an entirely fresh viewpoint, and now if you'll excuse me, I'd like to glance over the morning paper. *(With an air of dismissal, she coolly lights a cigarette, picks up the paper and proceeds to look it over, entirely ignoring the company. They wait a few seconds, then regard each other, somewhat nonplused.)*

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Is that all you have to say?

STELLA. Quite.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. But my dear madam—

STELLA. *Why—* Here's a picture of Governor Ogilvie! Tut—tut—he's getting fat! I must write and tell him he'd better *bant*— Nobody loves a fat man.

MISS BATTERSON. *(Eagerly)* Do you know Governor Ogilvie, personally?

STELLA. *(Nonchalantly)* Oh, yes—we traveled all over Europe together.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. *(Aghast)* What . . . ?

MISS BATTERSON. Oh, my goodness! Not alone?

STELLA. *No!*—Don't look like that—we were heavily chaperoned.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Mrs. Amaranth, I must insist that you give me some definite answer to deliver to the ladies.

STELLA. Very well, then. *(Puts newspaper down on tray)* You may tell them for me, if you care

to, that they are all jealous—every last one of you is in mortal terror of losing her husband.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Bounding up*) You delude yourself.

STELLA. I don't think so. Oh, it's a very natural fear—one can't blame you—I dare say your mirrors have whispered unpleasant warnings to all of you.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Bounds out of her seat*) You wicked woman! Do you *dare* to suggest that my husband's love for me is founded upon mere physical attraction?

STELLA. (*Regarding her critically*) Well, no. I take that back.

MISS BATTERSON. (*With a sigh*) I suppose good looks do count heavily with the men.

STELLA. They certainly do.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Well, Mrs. Amaranth, if that is the case, I am afraid *you* are facing tragedy!

STELLA. Yes? How?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Time is the *relentless* enemy of women such as *you*—and all the paint and powder in the world cannot conceal the fact that you are rapidly becoming *passée*!

STELLA. (*Stung*) Oh, really? And is that the opinion of the other ladies too?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*With much emphasis*) *It is.*

STELLA. Isn't it odd that your husbands don't appear to share your views?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Our husbands are like other men, merely dazzled by your flashy methods, but as an older woman, let me prophesy what the future holds in store for you if you continue on your present course.

STELLA. Dear me, you sound like a *witch* . . . Do go on.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. *I mean to.* The time is coming, my dear madam, and it is very near, when the

attentions of *men* will *no longer* be offered to you—

STELLA. (*With assumed gaiety*) How perfectly dreadful!

MRS. CHETSWOLD. I am afraid with your disposition you will find it so. And rest assured, Mrs. Amaranth, if you persist in your present course as a middle-aged Delilah, you will be *forced* by the world's cruel derision to that place in life where every *sensible* woman prefers to go gracefully—of her own accord!

STELLA. Dear me! And what place is that?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*With vindictive emphasis*) Up on the shelf!!

STELLA. (*Startled—slowly easing from her reclining position and rising with a slight note of terror*) The shelf?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. *Precisely!* And let me tell you, *you* will find it a desolate place, all by yourself, when your tinsel gods and your paint pots have gone back on you. . . . That may explain why we middle-aged, plain, *respectable* women cling fast to our jog-trot husbands. We want company beside us on the shelf; we know far too much about human heartaches to care to face sitting up there waiting for the end—*alone!* (MISS BATTERSON, *deeply affected, dabs her eyes with her handkerchief.* STELLA *shudders a trifle at the picture.*)

STELLA. (*With assumed lightness*) A very sentimental homily.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Sternly*) No. Mrs. Amaranth . . . a bitterly truthful one.

STELLA. (*With a glacial smile*) Must you go? (MISS BATTERSON *sadly nods assent and rises.*)

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Yes; we must. Since you are kind enough to suggest it. May I ask again, what are your intentions?

STELLA. You'll find out soon enough, if you keep

your eyes and ears open. But it seems superfluous to advise any of you to do *that*; doesn't it?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Good day to you, Mrs. Amaranth. I see you are quite incorrigible.

STELLA. Oh, *quite!* Sweet of you to have called. (To MISS BATTERSON) Thank you for everything. (Icily) Good-bye!

(MRS. CHETSWOLD sweeps out majestically through arch, upborne by sense of having crushed the enemy. MISS BATTERSON lingers falteringly on step, glances timidly over her shoulder, then comes hastily back and extends her hand impulsively to STELLA. STELLA is standing in thought with her back to MISS BATTERSON as she approaches.)

MISS BATTERSON. (D.C. In a nervous undertone) I didn't want to come. (STELLA turns, a bit startled at the sound of her voice.) Really I didn't. But they made me. Now don't feel badly. I think you're real sweet. (She hurries up to arch, then stops and turns to STELLA, who has watched her leave) Good-bye. (And now she hurries to catch up to MRS. CHETSWOLD.)

(STELLA stands with an expression of strained amiability until they are safely out of the way. Then her real feelings come to the surface. She is genuinely distressed and incensed, and she shows it. She moves toward the mirror that is on wall L. She stops and stares into it intently for a few seconds. She turns away with a reassured smile, satisfied with her appearance, and dismissing the late unpleasantness with a contemptuous shrug, she takes another look as EMMA speaks, having entered from the garden U.R., followed by BALDWIN CUSTARD, a

gawky youth of twenty, dressed in working clothes and carrying a carpenter's rule in his hand.)

EMMA. (*As STELLA places her hands on hips, EMMA, with BALDWIN following, starts in; when R. of C. chair she speaks*) Can Baldwin get into your room for a few minutes, ma'am?

STELLA. (*Still preoccupied*) What for?

EMMA. He wants to measure for a shelf—

STELLA. (*Turning to her, losing herself for a moment*) A shelf? What should I want with a shelf?

EMMA. Miss Caroline said you needed one.

STELLA. (*Sharply*) Oh, she did? Well, she is entirely mistaken. I won't have it.

EMMA. (*Mystified*) But it's for your hat boxes, ma'am. They're all over the closet floor.

STELLA. I—why—— (*She laughs slightly*) How absurd of me! Of course, Baldwin. Go right up. But hurry, please. (*Picking up a book from table.*)

BALDWIN. (*R. of EMMA*) Won't be two minutes, ma'am.

STELLA. I'll wait down here until you're through. (*Perusing the book*) Oh, Emma, has Mrs. Custard sent my blue frock back?

EMMA. Not yet.

STELLA. (*Turning on BALDWIN, irritated*) What is the matter with your mother, Baldwin?

BALDWIN. She's awful busy, and I heard her say yours was only a made-over job.

STELLA. (*Crossing D. to sit D.L.*) Oh, damn.

BALDWIN. (*Deeply horrified*) Ooh, Mrs. Amaranth . . .

STELLA. Oh, excuse me. I suppose I shouldn't swear. Excuse me.

BALDWIN. All right.

EMMA. Go on upstairs, Baldy. (*He exits over stairs.*)

STELLA. It makes me furious. That dress was the only thing I had that was fit to go motoring in.

EMMA. I wouldn't worry about that. Maybe Mr. Stanley won't be able to keep that date.

(*STELLA has fixed the pillows on settee so that she can recline with her back U.S. EMMA is getting coffee service gathered and takes it off with her.*)

STELLA. What makes you say that?

EMMA. His father got home this morning from the Capital. Baldwin tells me he met him on the street.

(*STANLEY ambles in dejectedly from the garden U.R.; comes D.C. By this time EMMA has gathered all the service, and the table is back in place and she exits with tray and contents.*)

STANLEY. (*D.C. Moodily*) Hullo, Stella . . .

STELLA. Good morning. Why so glum? Has someone been horrid to you, too?

STANLEY. Caroline gives me a pain in the neck.

STELLA. What? Again?

STANLEY. It's serious *this* time. (*Going over L.C., taking L.C. chair, turning it in, sits facing STELLA reclining on settee*) She's still furious because I kissed you.

STELLA. Is *that* all? Good heavens . . . will I ever live down that hideous affair?

STANLEY. It doesn't look that way. I tried to tell her that it was all in fun.

STELLA. (*With mock indignation she wheels off settee to a sitting position*) Fun? Two hundred and forty-six dollars' worth of perfectly good kisses

wasted on a lot of peasants! As if I got any thrill out of it! The darned old party was dying on its feet . . . until you suggested——

STANLEY. I *told* Caroline it was my idea. What's the matter with her, Stella? You're a woman; perhaps you can tell me. I'm all at sea.

STELLA. Jealousy, my dear boy.

STANLEY. (*Desperately*) But *why* should she be jealous? I *love* her! You've seen it too. (*And he moves himself and chair in a little nearer.*)

STELLA. Of course, and the silly girl ought to thank her stars for such a decent, sincere devotion. It's rare enough, God knows!

STANLEY. I wish she had *your* understanding.

STELLA. My dear, to have *that*, she would have to have my experience, and I suppose—(*With a sigh*)—*my years*.

STANLEY. (*Impatiently*) Oh, bosh!

STELLA. (*With a sigh*) Oh, come on, forget it. (*Rises and crosses D. of STANLEY, goes R.C., talking as she goes*) All this will blow over. And Stanley, if you'll let me give you a little piece of advice . . . (*And as she is hesitating STANLEY speaks.*)

STANLEY. (*Wheeling around to her*) I'll listen to anything from you, Stella. (*Facing front and thinking.*)

STELLA. (*Crossing to him and putting her hands on his shoulder to brace him up*) I think perhaps you had better put the soft pedal on your purely platonic partiality for me.

STANLEY. (*Taking her hand from his shoulder and holding it in his*) I *do* think the world of you, Stella, but it's all perfectly innocent.

STELLA. (*Tenderly patting his hand*) Of course it is.

STANLEY. (*Kisses her hand, then looks in her face and reads*) You are wonderful, Stella.

STELLA. I'm glad you think so, dear.

STANLEY. Caroline shouldn't misunderstand. . . . She ought to realize the sort of feeling I have for you.

STELLA. (*Amused at this boyish naivete, she strokes his hair*) Don't you think she does?

STANLEY. (*Still holding her hand*) No!—Why, I revere and respect you as if you were my own Mother!

STELLA. (*Wincing—but humorously draws away*) Ouch!

STANLEY. What's the matter?

STELLA. It came so suddenly . . .

STANLEY. What?

STELLA. Your maternal picture of me . . . you see I'm not used to myself in the role. . . .

STANLEY. Pshaw!— I didn't mean *Mother*, exactly— But you are so serene and *dependable*, Stella—somehow I always feel *safe* with you!

STELLA. Ouuuh! I don't know whether to kiss you or spank you. (*Then going nearer to him*) Now you run along and find Caroline. (*She bends over and kisses him tenderly just as CAROLINE enters from garden U.R.*)

CAROLINE. (U.R.C.) Ohhhh! (*STELLA backs away a step from STANLEY as he rises, all three are petrified for a moment. Then CAROLINE, obviously pretending to throw it off*) I beg your pardon. I'm sure I didn't mean to intrude. Don't look so *guilty*! It's *quite* all right!

STELLA. (*Turning to her and crossing c.*) Caroline, don't be silly!

CAROLINE. (*Has come D.R.C.*) I am not being silly, at least not any more. This performance merely confirms what I suspected. (*Rushing over D.L. to STANLEY, drawing her engagement ring from her finger. STELLA crosses D.R.*) Here, Stanley, you might as well take this. . . .



"THE SHELF"



"THE SHELF"

STANLEY. (*Declining to take it, putting his hands in his pockets*) What's all this for?

CAROLINE. I wouldn't dream of marrying you. As far as I'm concerned, everything is definitely over.

STANLEY. But why?

CAROLINE. It isn't necessary to go into details.

STELLA. (*Pleadingly*) Caroline! Are you going to let a fit of jealous temper ruin your life—your happiness?

CAROLINE. Don't speak to me, please.

STELLA. *But I must*, my dear child.

CAROLINE. Oh, do stop patronizing me! I'm not a child, I'm a grown woman.

STANLEY. (*Confronting her, indignantly*) Then why don't you act like one? What sense is there in your behaving like this? Breaking our engagement! What have I done, to merit it?

CAROLINE. (*Half to him*) You *know* what you've done.

STANLEY. I do *not*. And you certainly owe me an explanation!

CAROLINE. (*Right to him*) Very well, if you will have it in plain English. (*Now a step nearer to him*) I wouldn't trust myself, my *future* with any man who would weakly surrender to the first *fast* woman who happened to set her nets for him.

STANLEY. (*Shocked. WENDHAM enters from garden U.R.*) *Caroline!*

STELLA. Have you taken leave of your senses?

CAROLINE. No, indeed! I understand *you* thoroughly. There isn't a decent woman in this town who doesn't see through you! You would break up anyone's life to have another scalp at your belt! You are *man crazy*! It sticks out all over you.

WENDHAM. (*Has been standing U.R. of settee,*

now comes into the scene, coming D. behind settee to D.R.) Come, come, Caroline! (CAROLINE and STANLEY glance to him.) That will do. We must be fair!

CAROLINE. *Fair?* Was it fair to me, Father, for you to admit this woman to our home? You must have known her *real* character.

WENDHAM. (*With quiet dignity*) I did; and I do, and let me tell you I feel honored, to have your aunt Stella, as a guest in my home, for as long as she wishes to remain!

CAROLINE. Oh, you do! Then under those conditions, Father, let me tell you that if Mrs. Amaranth doesn't pack up and leave this house within twenty-four hours, *I will*.

WENDHAM. Caroline!

CAROLINE. And if I go, I go for *good*.

WENDHAM. You don't mean that!

CAROLINE. *Don't* I?

STANLEY. Caroline, I am ashamed of you. You are behaving horribly!

CAROLINE. (*Extending her hand with the ring*) Here's your ring.

STANLEY. I don't want the old ring.

STELLA. (*Impatient*) Take it, Stanley. Don't argue with her. (*He takes the ring.*) And please go.

STANLEY. (*Crossing D. and over L. of STELLA. CAROLINE goes U.L. a few steps*) Aren't you going to take a ride with me?

STELLA. (*To get him away*) Yes, yes! Later! But run along now.

STANLEY. But Stella . . .

STELLA. Please . . .

STANLEY. (*Not knowing what he ought to do, looking around and U.L.*) Well—au revoir, then . . . (*He goes out U.R. STELLA crosses to C.*)

STELLA. *Now.* Let me get this straight. You heard your daughter's ultimatum, John. (*CAROLINE has had her back to scene she nows turns in.*) And this is *your* house. Are you ordering me to leave?

WENDHAM. (*Comes D. and into scene R.C.*) Why, Stella, under the circumstances, I think it would be the most graceful thing you could do.

STELLA. (*After staring at him for a moment*) I wouldn't have believed it of you!

CAROLINE. (*Sweeping down at STELLA, but keeping a space to L.*) You didn't expect my father to let me go, did you?

STELLA. (*Fiercely*) Will you keep quiet, you intolerable little minx?

CAROLINE. (*Just as fierce*) Either you or I shall leave this house.

STELLA. (*With control*) If you really mean what you said, you had better start packing. I haven't the faintest intention of leaving here until I am ready to go.

CAROLINE. *Father*, are you going to allow this?

WENDHAM. You had better go away, Caroline, and let me settle this with your Aunt Stella.

CAROLINE. Very well. But if you let her wind you around her fingers, I'll never speak to you again. *Never!* (*CAROLINE goes up stairs with her head in the air.*)

STELLA. (*Has crossed U.L. as CAROLINE goes out and after a pause*) Well, what have you to say for yourself? What crime have I committed that *you*, of all people, should presume to order me out of your house?

WENDHAM. Why couldn't you behave? If you *must* be a coquette, couldn't you at least let my daughter's fiance alone?

STELLA. Oh, for pity sake, don't *you* be idiotic, too. What in the world would I want with that boy?

WENDHAM. But Caroline insists . . .

STELLA. Caroline is a ridiculous, jealous child. She ought to be taught a lesson. I've a good mind to undertake the job.

WENDHAM. Haven't you done mischief enough?

STELLA. How? In what way?

WENDHAM. Well, when you came to Kiwanisport, couldn't you have tried to conform to the conventions of the women you met.

STELLA. (*Pacing U. and D. stage*) I meant to. Heaven knows I was sweetness itself to every horrid one of them. I returned their calls. I drank their awful weak tea. I cooed over their brats, adenoids and all, listened to their inane gabbling until I almost went mad! What more do they expect? My Lord, I even went to church. (*Finishing this reading church line D.L. at WENDHAM.*)

WENDHAM. Yes, and flirted with the minister.

STELLA. (*After a look*) Is it my fault if that poor soul suffers from sex starvation?

WENDHAM. (*After a thought*) How do you know he does?

STELLA. His wife wears cashmere stockings in June. (*With a sob.*)

WENDHAM. Are you never serious?

STELLA. (*Sobbing; goes U. to sit in c. chair*) I never was more serious in my life.

WENDHAM. (*Going to chair R. of c. chair and standing back of it*) I'm sorry things have turned out this way, Stella. When you wrote me you were coming here, I was much pleased. I thought perhaps you had grown tired of batting around Europe, and had decided to settle down here among your own people.

STELLA. I did have some such fool idea, and now my own people disown me, as though I were an outcast.

WENDHAM. No, don't put it that way. You sim-

ply don't belong among us. That's all. You are like a . . . bird of paradise who has strayed into a barnyard. The hens are sure to pick on her.

STELLA. (*Still sobbing*) And you think it wisdom for this particular Bird of Paradise to fly away to where she *does* belong?

WENDHAM. Yes. Under the circumstances, I really do!

STELLA. (*With an effort and trying to check the sob*) Well, John, my difficulty is, I don't belong . . . anywhere.

WENDHAM. Eh . . . What do you mean?

STELLA. I have nowhere to go, my dear. I'm broke. *Flat!* Homeless, and in debt up to my ears. (*Shows him pile of envelopes on hour-glass table; picks them up and drops them one after another*) Look here . . . *Bills.*

WENDHAM. (*Stunned*) Why haven't you told me this before?

STELLA. Pride, I suppose. I'm not used to begging.

WENDHAM. But, Stella, I can't understand how you can be penniless, unless you have been imprudent or horribly extravagant.

STELLA. Both, darling. Always was.

WENDHAM. Well, I'm sorry, but what can I do? (*Now coming around to sit in the chair*) I'll be frank with you. I simply can't afford to have Stanley Risdale's engagement with Caroline broken off, because I am under heavy obligations to Senator Risdale.

STELLA. Don't tell me that that man has got some hold on you?

WENDHAM. No, not exactly, but . . .

STELLA. I hope you haven't been up to your old tricks again?

WENDHAM. (*Perturbed*) No, no, nothing of the sort. Now look here, Stella. I'm rather short

just now, but if you'll go away, I think I can manage to make you an allowance within reason—say fifty dollars a week.

STELLA. (*Sarcastically*) You dear, generous thing!

WENDHAM. But hang it, I'm not rich, no matter what people may think. And it's your own fault. You have no right to be broke. I paid you back forty-six thousand dollars with interest.

STELLA. Yes. You did, and since you have brought the subject up, I didn't squander *that* money. I turned it over to my first husband.

WENDHAM. (*Astounded*) You gave it to old Eustace?

STELLA. Yes. To dear, kind Colonel Eustace. It was *his* money, or so he said, the old wretch.

WENDHAM. But it was your jewelry that you—(*He hesitates. She looks in his eyes. He drops his head. She continues for him.*)

STELLA. Pawned? To help you out of a bad hole? Yes, he gave it to me. I thought it was mine, but it turned out I was mistaken. I have been mistaken a great many times in my life, and *hurt*. But never more so than today, God knows. (*Rises and goes U. between C. chair and table U.L. with a sob and turning away to cover it.*)

WENDHAM. (*At a loss, then after a slight pause*) Please don't. It isn't like you to cry . . .

STELLA. (*Still turned away*) No, it isn't. Not in public, at any rate. (*Now recovering herself and turning in with fists clenched, bringing them from her shoulders down to her side and strikes the picture and asks the question*) What the devil is wrong with me? I have always played square with everyone, haven't I?

WENDHAM. Yes . . . But at the same time, I simply can't have you here in justice to Caroline.

STELLA. *Justice!* Justice to Caroline. Tell me,

did you think of justice to her when she was a baby, nineteen years ago——

WENDHAM. What good will it do to rake all that up now?

STELLA. (*Coming D. on him*) You weren't thinking much about justice to your precious daughter when you misappropriated trust funds to gamble with on the stock market.

WENDHAM. (*Trying to stop her*) Now, Stella——

STELLA. And did I stop to think of justice to myself or to my jealous, niggardly old husband, when you came to me in desperation to borrow the money you had lost.

WENDHAM. Please!

STELLA. You don't want to hear about *that*, do you? You'd rather forget that, when my husband would have let you go to prison, I pawned every jewel I had and rescued *you* with the proceeds!

WENDHAM. Don't, don't . . . I know . . . I know . . .

STELLA. (*Coming down to him*) Then here is something you *don't* know—Eustace was insanely jealous. He said there must be something going on between you and me, or *I* wouldn't have been so anxious to save you.

WENDHAM. (*Rises*) Good Lord . . .

STELLA. When he found out what I had done, he threatened to sue me for a divorce, naming *you*, my sister's husband, as co-respondent!

WENDHAM. Stella! I never dreamed it.

STELLA. No; pretty, wasn't it? And every bit of that miserable money trouble of yours would have been aired in court, if I hadn't consented to divorce *him*. (*Going D.L. Sobbing*) . . . and so ended *one* of the wealthy marriages you now so pleasantly throw in my face.

WENDHAM. He was a damned scoundrel!

STELLA. (*Facing away from him, sobbing through*

it, handkerchief to mouth) Oh, I don't know. It's mighty hard to tell the difference between a damned scoundrel and a noble, high-minded character like *you*. Sometimes their methods are so similar.

WENDHAM. That's pretty harsh. It doesn't sound like *you*.

STELLA. Doesn't it? Well, perhaps I'm hardening. I hope so. (*She is coming out of it and finding herself*) I've always been too easy going, that's what's the matter with me. But from now on I'm going to fight back. (*Going down to him L.C.*) And let me tell you, there are very few people who can match wits with me, when I obey my head instead of my heart.

WENDHAM. (*Piteously*) You don't mean to tell Caroline any of this?

STELLA. (*CAROLINE is coming down the stairs*) Oh! You utter idiot! What sort of a rotter do you take me for?

CAROLINE. (*Comes in hurriedly and remains U.L.*) Father . . . Senator Risdale's car is stopping at the door.

STELLA. (*Crossing around U. and L. of C. chair*) Heavens, he mustn't see me looking like this.

CAROLINE. (*STELLA and CAROLINE come face to face U.L. Coldly*) Are you still determined to remain here?

STELLA. My dear, I'd be charmed to. You have all been so cordial. But the decision rests with your father. Ask *him*.

CAROLINE. (*Furiously to C.*) Does Aunt Stella go, Father, or must I?

WENDHAM. (*Uneasily*) I'm sorry. But, in common decency, you can't ask me to turn a guest out of my house.

CAROLINE. But I *do* ask you to!

WENDHAM. Well, then, I won't do it. That's flat!

CAROLINE. (*At first stunned and hurt; then finally*) That's all I wanted to know. I shall leave this house to-morrow morning.

WENDHAM. But where are you going? Where *can* you go?

CAROLINE. As far away as I can get . . . to New York.

STELLA. (*Lightly and coming D.L.*) Life in a great city! My dear, you won't like it at all.

CAROLINE. (*Although ignoring STELLA turns to her and blurts*) I'm not speaking to you. (*Then to her father*) Before Senator Risdale leaves, I'd like to talk to him. He will probably want some explanation.

WENDHAM. Very well. I'll tell him. (*CAROLINE goes out by garden door U.R. Crossing over, sits back to foots on settee D.R.*) This is a fearful blow, Stella. My whole heart is wrapped up in that girl.

STELLA. Cheer up! She's not dreaming of going away.

WENDHAM. (*EMMA on U.U.R.*) You don't know her as I do. She is very stubborn.

EMMA. (*In arch U.C.*) Senator Risdale is in the library, Mr. Wendham.

WENDHAM. (*Rises*) Tell him I'll be right in.

EMMA. Yes, sir. (*Exit U.U.R.*)

STELLA. (*WENDHAM crosses to R.C. STELLA crosses in to him*) Why not take Caroline in with you? If I know the Senator, he'll talk her out of her nonsense in five minutes.

WENDHAM. (*Surprised*) Do you know the Senator?

STELLA. Oh, yes, indeed! We are old friends. Hurry now; do as I tell you and stop worrying. (*BALDWIN is heard whistling, coming nearer from the distance. STELLA takes JOHN'S arm to start him going*) You mustn't keep the great man waiting.

WENDHAM. Well, perhaps you're right. I'll go and get her. (*Exit WENDHAM in garden U.R.*)

(*STELLA goes U. in arch. BALDWIN, still whistling, has entered U.R. and the sound turns STELLA to face him U.R. carrying a plank. He then sees her and stops with an "Oh!"*)

STELLA. (*In C. of arch*) Are you here again?

BALDWIN. Yes'm. I got it all ready for you.

STELLA. Oh, you have? Well, you can take it away, young man. I don't want it.

BALDWIN. (*Puzzled*) But Miss Caroline ordered it.

STELLA. Then by all means put it in *her* room. She may need it. (*Goes U. over stairs; stops at first landing*) I shan't require a shelf for ages and ages, and you can go and tell your mother to telephone that around.

BALDWIN. (*Sore*) Well, what do you want me to do, *sit* on it?

STELLA. *Yes!* and I hope it has splinters. (*She turns over the stairs. Exits. BALDWIN looks after her, agape.*)

(*SENATOR RISDALE strolls on from U.U.R. The SENATOR is a grim, formidable-appearing man of about fifty. There is nothing whatever of the demagogue in his dress or demeanor. He looks more like a successful business man than a politician. As a matter of fact, he is both. He carries a big black unlighted cigar, and enters the room without noticing BALDWIN, who stands, still dazed, looking upstairs. As the SENATOR reaches D.S. of the arch, BALDWIN speaks. The SENATOR hears his voice and speaks.*)

BALDWIN. (*With conviction and to himself*)
She's nutty!

SENATOR RISDALE. (*Turning sharply R. at the sound of the voice*) Hullo!

BALDWIN. Oh! Hello, Senator.

SENATOR. (*Crossing to table U.L., for matches*)
Any matches around here? (*Sces the box on the table*) Oh, yes. (*Strikes one; lights his cigar.*)
Where is everybody?

BALDWIN. (*Coming D.C. with his eye on SENATOR, his ideal*) I dunno. Mrs. Amaranth, she just flew upstairs.

SENATOR RISDALE. *Flew up, hey?* What was her hurry?

BALDWIN. I guess she seen you coming.

SENATOR. (*Still at the table U.L., about finished lighting cigar*) Humph! I'm sorry if I have that effect on a charming woman. (*With a cautious look about, he turns D. to BALDWIN, speaking in a low voice*) Did you find anything, Bub?

BALDWIN. No, sir. There weren't any letters. Not a one.

SENATOR. Did you go through everything in her room?

BALDWIN. Every darned thing: bureau drawers, trunks, hat boxes and all. Nothin' was locked.

SENATOR. Hmm. No papers of any kind?

BALDWIN. Nothing . . . (*Taking a cautious look, then back to SENATOR*) Except . . . (*SENATOR turns in to hear.*)

SENATOR. Except what?

BALDWIN. A tin cash box, filled with pawn tickets.

SENATOR. (*With quickened interest*) *Pawn tickets.*

BALDWIN. Yes, sir. That's all there was. I did the best I could.

SENATOR. I suppose you did. (*Takes a dollar*

bill from his change pocket) Here. Here's your fee. We'll make a secret service agent out of you yet. (*Crosses D.L. Sits on settee.*)

BALDWIN. (*Ecstatically, taking the money, follows SENATOR L.*) Do you really mean it, Senator? You'll get me appointed? Ma says, with you back of me, I can go far.

SENATOR. If you keep on the way you're going, there's no telling *where* you'll wind up!

BALDWIN. (*Highly gratified*) Oh, thanks, Senator!

SENATOR. Now get along with you. (*BALDWIN still gaping at his ideal.*) Beat it.

BALDWIN. Yes, sir. I'm goin'. (*Now he goes out R.C. Then a thought hits him, he snaps his finger and returns to SENATOR, all business*) And if you want any more detectin' work done, Senator, you kin always find me down to the carpenter shop. (*Exit U.R. All through this scene BALDWIN has carried the plank for STELLA's shelf.*)

(*SENATOR smokes and ponders. He looks worried. He is in fact very much so. As BALDWIN leaves through U.R. door, WENDHAM enters U.R. door, followed by CAROLINE.*)

SENATOR. (*Rising as he sees them enter*) Ah!

WENDHAM. (*SENATOR has come into C. WENDHAM goes D. to greet him*) Well, Senator! Glad to see you. (*They shake.*) When did you get back?

SENATOR. This morning. (*Drops D.S. a step. WENDHAM crosses to D.L.U.S. of SENATOR. SENATOR holds open his arms for CAROLINE to come into them*) And here's my little girl. (*She comes into his arms and he kisses her*) Now, you just give an account of yourself, young woman. What's all this tommyrot that boy of mine's been trying to tell me about you and him? (*Breaking the embrace.*)

CAROLINE. What did he say?

SENATOR. Just met him—said you two had had a spat. Well, that's natural, at your age.

CAROLINE. It was more than a spat. Your son has shown himself to me in his true colors!

SENATOR. Humph! Not very bright to do *that*. Ought to have waited till after he got you.

CAROLINE. It's no joke.

SENATOR. Oh, go along with you. You and Stanley are acting like a couple of bad kids. (*Backs a step away from her*) This Amaranth woman has been making eyes at him, I understand.

CAROLINE. He kissed her!

SENATOR. My, my! Stanley'll get over it.

CAROLINE. Well, I won't.

SENATOR. (*With hands on her shoulders*) Sure you will. Pshaw! You've got too much backbone to let her get the best of you. Now you run along and find Stanley. (*Crosses D.R.*) I want to talk to your father.

CAROLINE. I never want to see Stanley Risdale again!

SENATOR. (*Composedly*) Bosh! Ahem! Wendham, it's a hot, thirsty day, and as I am not a camel, could we——

WENDHAM. Why, certainly. A high ball?

SENATOR. Rye. Ante-bellum, if possible.

WENDHAM. (*Getting keys from pocket*) Certainly. Caroline, will you——

CAROLINE. (*Crossing D.L. to WENDHAM*) Surely. Let me have the keys . . . (*He hands them to her. She starts U.S.*)

SENATOR. (R.C.) A tall glass with plenty of ice, Carrie; and don't be stingy with the liquor.

CAROLINE. Very well. (*Exits from c. of arch to off L.*)

WENDHAM. (*After CAROLINE has gone . . . eagerly*) Well, Senator, what news?

SENATOR. (*Dropping his mask that he put on for CAROLINE and looking careworn, steps to c. chair*) Rotten. It looks like we are licked, Wendham. Ogilvie is going to veto the State Park Bill!

WENDHAM. (*Stunned*) My God, I *hope* not!

SENATOR. 'Tisn't a question of hope. I got it straight. He *is*.

WENDHAM. But can't you do anything?

SENATOR. No. Not any more than I have. I've pulled every wire, brought every pressure to bear. No go. Ogilvie is after the party leadership.

WENDHAM. *What! !* But why in God's name has he turned on you like this?

SENATOR. Ambition, partly. That second term made him think he's so solid with the voters he can run things without *me*. Besides that, he's nursing a grudge against me that I guess *you* don't know anything about. (*Slowly sits c.*)

WENDHAM. And are you helpless?

SENATOR. Looks that way right now. That dirty dog means to veto that bill and then broadcast over the radio that it's a *grab*.

WENDHAM. (*Rising in agitation*) If he does that—why—every cent I've got or could raise is sunk in that river land!

SENATOR. (*Irritably*) What's the good of belly-aching? I'm in the same boat, ain't I? Damn it, it means my finish. Politically and every other way!

WENDHAM. (*Chewing it over to himself*) Thousands of acres of worthless wilderness! Good God, Risdale, this means utter ruin for *me* and you were so *sure*.

SENATOR. (*Angrily*) Of course I was sure. How the hell could I foresee that this yellow pup would dare to turn and show his teeth at me? (*Up and on his feet. Pointing a finger at WENDHAM*) I'm not through fighting yet.

WENDHAM. But you just said . . .

SENATOR. Wait a minute . . . (*He goes up to arch and looks up the stairs.* WENDHAM sits D.L. SENATOR comes D. to chair L. of C. chair and in lowered, tense tones) There's one hope for us. Just one trump card left in the deck. (*Sits.*)

WENDHAM. What is it?

SENATOR. Your sister-in-law, *Mrs. Amaranth.*

WENDHAM. (*Astonished*) Stella? What does *she* know about politics?

SENATOR. Nothing, maybe. But she knows a hell of a lot about Horace Ogilvie.

WENDHAM. Ogilvie . . . ? *How?* Has she ever met the man?

SENATOR. *Met him?* Humph! She was engaged to be married to him. (*WENDHAM draws back, surprised at this.*) Didn't you know that?

WENDHAM. No . . . She hasn't discussed her affairs with me.

SENATOR. (*Approvingly*) Got a close mouth, that woman. Brains, too, when she wants to use 'em. I admire her, damned if I don't! Well, this all happened before we put that two-spot up for Governor—as a compromise candidate; remember?

WENDHAM. I certainly do.

SENATOR. (*Sneeringly*) Fine, upright, noble character; champion of the people, purifier of politics, and all the rest of the bunk. It was the only card I had left to play, and we won with it by the grace of God and a narrow squeak!

WENDHAM. But you did win, Senator.

SENATOR. Yeah. But that campaign was damned hard sledding, and don't you forget it. Well, sir, after we nominated this plaster of paris saint, I happened to find out he was secretly engaged to Mrs. Amaranth. You can just bet I put the kibosh on *that quick!!*

WENDHAM. You did?—Why?

SENATOR. Why? . . . Why, she led a "don't

give a damn" sort of life. She had one husband divorce her and another one blow out what brains he had when he went broke in London—— Can't you see what campaign material that would have been for the opposition newspapers?

WENDHAM. Well, all this is news to me . . . How did Stella take it?

SENATOR. Like a sport. I had to do the dirty work for him. Ogilvie didn't have the nerve to face her.

WENDHAM. Rather an unpleasant mission for you, wasn't it?

SENATOR. Yeah. She could have made us a lot of trouble.

WENDHAM. She could . . . how?

SENATOR. She had all his love-letters . . . saved 'em, as women will. But it never seemed to occur to her. She just said if that's the kind of a man Ogilvie is, she wouldn't marry him on a bet. Took the next boat for Europe . . . and that was the end of it.

WENDHAM. But I don't see how she can help us now?

SENATOR. She still has the Governor's love-letters. She needs money, and if she doesn't hate Ogilvie for the throw-down she got, then she isn't the high-spirited woman I take her for.

WENDHAM. But even so—what good are the letters?

SENATOR. (*Rises, impatient that WENDHAM doesn't see through it*) He's been married since . . . to a feminine Hell-raiser. (*Crosses D.R.*)

(CAROLINE steps in the arch from L. and crosses D.L.C.)

CAROLINE. Emma will bring your drinks in a moment.

(WENDHAM *exits through arch U.L.*)

SENATOR. (*With the loving tone again for CAROLINE*) Tell her to fetch 'em into the library, will you? Your pa and I are going into executive session. Seen Stanley?

CAROLINE. I'm not worrying about him!

SENATOR. You're not, hey? You just wait 'til you're married. (*Exits U. arch L.*)

(*As they leave, auto horn off right. CAROLINE crosses U.R., looks U.R. Exits quickly U. arch L. After a short pause STANLEY enters U.R., at the same moment STELLA, dressed for her ride, descends the stairs, carrying a gay-colored jacket and a handbag over her arm. STANLEY is dressed for the drive.*)

STELLA. (*Has come D.L. of c. chair*) I'm all ready.

STANLEY. (*Has come D.R. of c. chair*) Gee, you look lovely!

STELLA. Stanley, I'm frightened to death. After what's happened, I don't know whether I *dare* go motoring with you.

STANLEY. Bosh! Why not? You're of age, aren't you?

STELLA. Hmmm—yes, I'll admit that much—but still——

STANLEY. Don't worry about Caroline. She's thrown me over and I'm glad of it.

STELLA. (*Incredulously*) Glad? Why?

STANLEY. (*Taking her hand*) Because I've found out that I don't love her at all! She's not worth your little finger.

STELLA. (*Drawing her hand away*) Stanley, if you're going to be silly——

STANLEY. (*A step to her*) It isn't silly! You

represent everything that I admire and reverence in a woman.

STELLA. Stop it! I'm vain enough as it is.

STANLEY. You are not vain at all. You're a marvelous woman. If I could only find words to tell you how much I really think of you.

STELLA. (*Retreats a step*) What's gotten into you?

STANLEY. (*His impulse gaining on him*) I've been thinking it all over, Stella, and I've got a great idea—a *wonderful* idea!

STELLA. Not really?

STANLEY. A way out of all our trouble . . . It came to me all of a sudden. I want you to *marry me*, Stella.

STELLA. (*Astounded*) Good Heavens! What for?

STANLEY. I want to protect you from all the meanness and gossip. As my wife, nobody would dare to say a word against you. Dad would see to that. You *will* marry me, won't you? Say you *will*!

STELLA. Stanley, you are out of your mind. You are hurt and angry at Caroline; and this is reaction—*pique*! You love *her* and you know you do.

STANLEY. *No*. That's all over now. I've always known Caroline. We are more like brother and sister than lovers. My feeling for *you* is different altogether.

STELLA. I am tremendously flattered that you think you want me. But *no*, dear boy. It would never do.

STANLEY. Why not?

STELLA. Well, in the first place, I am *older* than you. And then there is your father. What do you suppose *he* would say?

STANLEY. My father never tries to dictate to me.

Dad's the most sensible man in the world. He'd never try to come between two people who love each other.

STELLA. Wouldn't he? I know better.

STANLEY. Why should we have to care what my father may think? If you'll only say yes, you can defy the whole universe . . . You can snap your fingers at Kiwanisport.

STELLA. Nothing would suit me better.

STANLEY. Then you will? Stella, dearest . . .
(*He grabs her in his arms.*)

STELLA. Oh, no, no, no! Stanley, we mustn't . . . this is all too foolish.

STANLEY. (*His impulse leading him a merry race, he is now full steam. Over nearer to her, she backs a step, but he forges ahead*) Why? Is it foolish to be mad about you? Then I want to be foolish. Can I help loving you?

STELLA. (*Trying to stop him*) But I . . .

STANLEY. You're adorable. I can't help it. I don't want to help it. There is nobody in the world like you. Say you'll marry me. Stella, you must—
(*He kisses her in an ecstasy of passion. She is struggling to get away. He keeps right on as he kisses her*) You've got to marry me . . . I will have you . . . (*She ceases to struggle and goes limp in his arms, not proof against his onslaught of physical passion. She yields to his kiss, then he releases her and she gently pushes him away.*)

STELLA. Oh, Stanley . . . (*Abashed.*)

STANLEY. You will marry me . . . won't you?

STELLA. Noooo. (*He backs away from her three back steps, then turns to go.*) Wait! (*He is leaping again at this word, but she puts up a hand. He waits. With a thought back of it and a determination*) All right, Stanley . . . let's be engaged.

STANLEY. My dearest! (*Making another grab for her.*)

STELLA. Wait . . . wait! I'm willing to engage myself to you tentatively—for one week.

STANLEY. For a week? ? ?

STELLA. Yes; to see if we are really suited to each other. It's a whim of mine, and you must promise me one thing.

STANLEY. I'll promise you anything.

STELLA. Will you swear to be true to me for one week, and stay engaged to me, no matter *what* pressure is brought to bear on you?

STANLEY. (*Getting the ring from his side coat pocket*) I swear it on this ring. Stella, take it and wear it. (*He forces it in her hand and kisses her hand as he does.*)

STELLA. (*Hesitating*) Do you think I should? What will Caroline say?

STANLEY. You are not to worry about what *anybody* says. You've got *me* to protect you now.

STELLA. You dear, impulsive boy! What a pity you have to grow up. (*He tries to kiss her.*) Now, Stanley . . .

STANLEY. *Kiss me!*

STELLA. That's enough. (*Breaks his hold on her*) If we're going for a ride, we'd better be starting.

STANLEY. (*He leaps over to c. chair, picks up her coat, holds it for her to put it on*) Come on. I'm ready . . .

STELLA. What a rattle-brain I am. (*Takes a step to STANLEY*) I forgot my gloves. Go on out and wait in the car, dear, while I run upstairs and get them.

STANLEY. Don't be long.

STELLA. Two minutes.

STANLEY. Righto . . . (*He rushes to U.R. door*

for exit, then stops) Darling . . . (*He's gone. STELLA crosses R., then U. to button R. of arch, then comes D.R. Slips the ring on her finger; admires it as EMMA enters.*)

EMMA. (*Sourly, after looking around and seeing only STELLA*) Was it you who rang that bell?

STELLA. Yes, Emma. Will you ask Senator Risdale if he will see me for just a moment before I go out?

EMMA. He's shut up in the library. I don't know as I dare disturb him.

STELLA. Oh, but this is *very* important. Please, Emma. He won't mind, I know.

EMMA. Very well, I'll tell him. But don't be surprised if he snaps your head off! (*EMMA exits U.U.R.*)

(*While STELLA is waiting she puts her coat on, then with her back turned to arch, she repairs the damage STANLEY has wrought on her complexion. As she takes her handbag—it contains a mirror and such—SENATOR RISDALE comes on from U.U.R. He steps to the arch opening, sees her D.R., then he crosses L., then comes D.L. of C. chair with a slow step, holding his eye on her narrowly, and in a quiet tone he speaks.*)

SENATOR RISDALE. (*D.L.C.*) How-de-do, Mrs. Amaranth. Glad to see you again. (*She turns to him. He extends his hand.*)

STELLA. (*With effusiveness containing a hint of mockery, crosses to the SENATOR*) My dear Senator . . . the enthusiasm is mutual. It's nearly four years since we saw each other, isn't it? I can hardly believe it. You look quite *five* years younger!

SENATOR. (*Dryly*) Thanks. You look pretty blooming yourself.

STELLA. I am what the agriculturalists call a hardy perennial.

SENATOR. Umm! Looks that way . . . You wanted to see me?

STELLA. I want to ask a favor of you. (SENATOR regards her quizzically. She smiles back roguishly) In fact, *two* favors.

SENATOR. Yeh? What are they?

STELLA. (*Naively*) Well, *first*, I'd like to have you call off those horrid, clumsy detectives you've engaged to follow me around.

SENATOR. (*With a start*) Detectives?

STELLA. (*Sweetly*) Yes; quite so. Or else, if you *must* keep up this flattering interest in my movements, won't you please hire some *nice* men? Something better looking and more presentable?

SENATOR. My dear madam, what makes you assume that I——

STELLA. Now, *don't* lie about it, Senator dear, or you will lose your reputation with me for finesse.

SENATOR. (*With a dry smile*) Humph! Eh, well . . . and what's the *other* favor?

STELLA. Only this. The next time you think it necessary to have Baldwin Custard go through my effects, please instruct him to put things back as he found them. It annoys a woman very much to have her personal belongings pawed over and upset.

SENATOR. (*Entering into the spirit of her game, nods complacently*) I shall certainly speak to him about it.

STELLA. Thanks . . . that's awfully sweet of you.

SENATOR. Oh, not at all, and—er—the men you spoke of—won't bother you any further, now that you are here—on the spot.

STELLA. Under *your wing*

SENATOR. Exactly . . . Anything else?

(*AUTO Horn.*)

STELLA. No. No more favors. (*She bows. He bows. She goes U.R., then stops, turning in and coming back*) Oh, yes, by the bye, I almost forgot. Do you remember the last time we met?

SENATOR. Naturally.

STELLA. On that occasion, you disapproved very strongly of a matrimonial venture I was contemplating.

SENATOR. I explained my reasons for disapproving.

STELLA. So you did; very clearly and with infinite tact. Well, Senator, you elected your Governor at *my* expense. For a while, I felt rather cheated and forlorn, but I got over it, and *now* I've got a delightful piece of news for you.

SENATOR. That so? What is it?

STELLA. I'm engaged to be married again.

SENATOR. (*Oh, so happy*) I'm delighted to hear it, Mrs. Amaranth. Who is the lucky man?

STELLA. Your son! !

SENATOR. (*Astounded*) The *hell* you say . . . ?

STELLA. Yes, indeed. *Hard and fast!* See here! (*Shoves her hand with the ring on it under his nose*) My ring. A beauty, isn't it? And *mind*, I'm not to be reasoned out of it this time, Senator. I'm following the dictates of my heart—as a woman should, *shouldn't she?*

SENATOR. (*Struck speechless*) I won't . . .

STELLA. Precisely! I *knew* you'd be pleased. (*Taking in nearer to him*) Particularly when you stop to think that those letters you are after will be in the family now, so you won't have to steal them or have me knocked over the head to get hold of them! (*Auto horn off right.*) My word, I must fly. Stanley's getting impatient. It's positively

touching! The dear boy can't bear to have me out of his sight. (*Auto horn off right. She is up near garden door U.R. Waves her hand to him*) See you at dinner, Father . . . (*Auto horn more insistent. STELLA runs off as the—*)

CURTAIN FALLS

ACT II

SCENE: *Same as Act I. Late afternoon of the same day.*

AT RISE: *Phone is ringing down right, insistently. After a moment CAROLINE comes in through L. in arch and goes to phone.*

CAROLINE. Hello—this is Caroline speaking . . . Oh, how do you do, Mrs. Custard? What? *(With a change of tone, very frigidly)* I'm sure I don't know anything about it.—No! Really, I can't give you any definite information. I'm sure if there is any truth in the report you'll get hold of the facts as soon as anyone.

(WENDHAM enters U.U.R., followed by the SENATOR, who has some notes on a scrap of paper he carries in his hand, and as he enters he is still going over the notes in his mind. SENATOR goes down C.; as he approaches the arch he takes in CAROLINE talking on phone. Puts the paper in his pocket and comes down C., looking at CAROLINE and waiting for the conversation to cease. WENDHAM goes down L. and waits on CAROLINE to stop talking.)

CAROLINE. Sorry for *me*?—Please don't be—I assure you I am not asking for sympathy.—Oh, not at all!—Good-bye.

WENDHAM. *(Observing CAROLINE'S chagrin)* Who was it *this* time?

CAROLINE. (*Sits down R.*) The dressmaker . . . Mrs. Custard.

SENATOR. Huh! What did that old scandal-monger have to say?

CAROLINE. Condolences, like all the rest of them. —Mrs. Amaranth stopped in there with Stanley, and showed the woman her engagement ring.

WENDHAM. (*To SENATOR*) I can't understand Stella doing such a thing.

SENATOR. No—'tisn't like her to rub things in.

CAROLINE. It's just spite.

SENATOR. Don't worry over it, Caroline—leave it to me . . . I'll fix things.

CAROLINE. How?—What can you do?

SENATOR. I dunno. Can't play cards until I know what the lady's game is. I can't believe she's really in earnest about getting married, so don't fret. I'll patch this up between you and Stanley.

CAROLINE. (*Turning away, to front*) You needn't trouble yourself. I wouldn't marry your son if he were the last man living.

SENATOR. Rather see him go to the dogs, eh?

CAROLINE. I don't care *where* he goes.

SENATOR. Well, I do!—and you are going to stay right here on the job and help me save him. This talk about your leaving home is all foolishness.

CAROLINE. (*Rises—takes a step to C.*) Is it?—You'll see.

SENATOR. (*Crossing to CAROLINE*) You'll never get anywhere in the world if you walk out on trouble, Caroline. Face it! Swat it on the nose! That's the only way.

EMMA. (*Entering from hall L.*) Mrs. Chetswold and the Doctor is calling.

SENATOR. (*With a groan*) Oh, Lord!

CAROLINE. Show them out here.

SENATOR. *Must* you?

CAROLINE. (*Surprised*) Why not? Have them come in, Emma, of course.

EMMA. Yes, ma'am. (*Exit as enter.*)

SENATOR. I'm not anxious to be bothered with the Reverend Chetswold right now.

CAROLINE. Why not?

SENATOR. Got enough on my mind. (*To WENDHAM*) You see, I invested a little nest egg for him, and I expect he is getting worried about it.

WENDHAM. Is *he* in on this, too?

SENATOR. Yes. He's *in* all right.

CAROLINE. (*A step to SENATOR*) Oh, I do hope you haven't lost any money for them!

SENATOR. So do I for various reasons.

(*Enter MRS. CHETSWOLD up left, followed by the REV. DOCTOR CHETSWOLD. The DOCTOR is a refined, scholarly, timid man, in his middle forties. He has an anxious air of always trying to please, and he is ready at any time to switch his opinions and agree with whatever anyone says. He is an earnest Christian, but a weak character. His respect for wealth is enormous, and he is in mortal fear of his wife. The two come in, evidently bowed down by weight of woe, with the hushed solemnity of a couple of undertakers. DR. CHETSWOLD, in fact, wears the stricken countenance he reserves for the funerals of very wealthy parishioners.*)

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Good afternoon, Caroline . . . Good afternoon, all. (*They all nod good afternoon. MRS. CHETSWOLD enters c., goes directly down L., then the REVEREND appears.*)

REVEREND CHETSWOLD. (*Coming in c. and coming down L. of c. chair—sees CAROLINE first*) Good afternoon, Caroline.

CAROLINE. Good afternoon, Doctor.

REV. CHETSWOLD. Mr. Wendham.

WENDHAM. How are you, Doctor? (*Before WENDHAM can reply he catches sight of SENATOR, who is almost hidden from view, as he is directly in front of tall c. chair.*)

REV. CHETSWOLD. Ah! Senator . . . ! (*Goes to SENATOR with welcome hand outstretched. SENATOR takes it.*)

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*With overdone sympathy*) Caroline, my poor dear child, we have just heard the dreadful news . . . My heart bleeds for you.

REV. CHETSWOLD. Yes . . . Oh, my, yes!—A most appalling state of affairs, Senator. Ah, well! (*Shakes his head sadly*) We must learn to be brave; we must be content to welcome our afflictions with humble thanksgiving! Yes, ah, yes!

SENATOR RISDALE. (*With a snort*) I am afraid I haven't quite got to that state of sanctity yet, Reverend.

CAROLINE. Do sit down, both of you. We are just about to have tea. (*WENDHAM crosses to sit down R. CAROLINE goes up R. of arch to ring bell for EMMA.*)

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Collapsing into settee down L.* SENATOR *sits C.* REV. CHETSWOLD *sits in chair L. of c. chair*) Thank you. It will be welcome. I am positively *limp* with distress!

CAROLINE. (*Rings for EMMA—comes down R. of REV. CHETSWOLD*) It's so warm, perhaps you'd prefer *iced* tea?

REV. CHETSWOLD. (*Hesitantly*) Why—er—I—

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Sternly*) No! Hot! Hot tea, if you please, Caroline—Dr. Chetswold has recently consumed more *iced* tea than was good for him.

(EMMA enters in arch.)

REV. CHETSWOLD. Dear me, so I did! Yes, yes—
(To CAROLINE) *Hot*, if you don't mind, and under
the circumstances, the hotter the better.

CAROLINE. Bring the tea, Emma, please.

EMMA. Yes, ma'am. (*Exits up U.R.*)

(CAROLINE takes the bowl of flowers that are on
the table up L. and takes them to the coffee table
that is U.L.L., then she returns and sits in chair
that is U. of U.L. table. All sit in thought dur-
ing this lapse of time. The Chetswolds look
professionally woebegone, and as no one says
anything, the REVEREND, as an expert grief-
assuager, breaks the ice by heaving a lugubri-
ous sigh and wagging his head sadly, after
CAROLINE has deposited the flowers that EMMA
may use this table for the tea service and she
has seated herself L. of the REV. CHETSWOLD.)

SENATOR RISDALE. (*Brusquely*) Come out of it,
Reverend. This isn't a funeral, you know.

REV. CHETSWOLD. (*With a start*) Yes, yes—
that is, I mean to say, *no*—certainly *not*. But this
turn of events is so mystifying . . . I am aghast!
Mrs. Amaranth seemed *such* a lady!

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*With acerbity*) If you think
so, Herbert, you prove conclusively that *you* are a
very poor judge of *ladies*!

REV. CHETSWOLD. (*Mildly resentful of this asper-
sion*) Surely *you* should be the last one to say *that*
about me, Agatha.

SENATOR RISDALE. Listen to *me* a minute if you
don't mind.

REV. CHETSWOLD. Oh, we don't mind at all!
Dear me, *no*! It's a pleasure.

SENATOR RISDALE. It isn't necessary to squander
any grief over this reported engagement of Mrs.
Amaranth to my son—

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Brightening up*) Ah! You mean you are going to *forbid* it?

SENATOR RISDALE. No, ma'am. I'm not such a fool. But right now, I want you folks—(*EMMA has now arrived with the tea and CAROLINE is up pouring some—EMMA is left of CAROLINE*)—to sit tight, accept the situation, and leave matters to me.

REV. CHETSWOLD. I'm sure they couldn't be left in better hands.

CAROLINE. Sugar, Mrs. Chetswold?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. No, no sugar.

CAROLINE. Emma . . . Mrs. Chetswold. (*Giving EMMA a cup of tea which EMMA delivers to MRS. CHETSWOLD, going down around L. of MRS. CHETSWOLD, taking a napkin with her—then returns to R. of CAROLINE. CAROLINE is pouring another cup.*)

REV. CHETSWOLD. (*To WENDHAM, dreamily down R.*) And how are you today, my dear Wendham?

WENDHAM. Oh, very well, thanks, Reverend . . .

CAROLINE. You like yours sweet, don't you, Dr. Chetswold?

REV. CHETSWOLD. Oh, my, yes, as sweet as possible—*five* lumps if you please. (*CAROLINE takes five lumps out of sugar bowl with the tongs and places them in the REVEREND'S cup.*) Sugar, my one particular vice. (*The SENATOR isn't thinking of the REVEREND. SENATOR is dreaming.*) Senator! !

SENATOR RISDALE. Oh . . . Yes, yes . . .

CAROLINE. Your tea, Doctor.

REV. CHETSWOLD. (*Turning to CAROLINE and taking the cup*) Thank you so much. (*EMMA drops down R. of REVEREND and gives him a napkin, then back again R. of CAROLINE.*)

CAROLINE. Tea, Father?

WENDHAM. No, none for me.

CAROLINE. How about you, Senator?

SENATOR. No—mmph . . . I've been het up enough for one day.

CAROLINE. Then that's all, Emma.

EMMA. Very well, ma'am. (EMMA exits U.U.R. CAROLINE pours for herself and sits.)

REV. CHETSWOLD. (*Sits his tea round and round, takes a sip and assumes a beatific smile*) Delicious! (*Smacks his lips*) Nectar!—Really!

CAROLINE. Do have some angel cake, Doctor.

REV. CHETSWOLD. Yes, yes . . . I will. I am extremely partial to it. (*He helps her put a slice on his plate*) My dear Senator, in my agitation I quite forgot to mention that we are glad to see you back again . . . Senator . . .

SENATOR RISDALE. (*Dreaming in thought*) Oh . . . yeh, kind of you to say so.

REV. CHETSWOLD. Yes, isn't it . . . er . . . I have been anxious, naturally, to hear how my little financial venture is progressing—

SENATOR RISDALE. Oh, yes . . . I meant to— (*With an "I knew it was coming" look to WENDHAM.*)

REV. CHETSWOLD. Ah, I needn't have worried about it. I know it's all right, knowing you.

SENATOR RISDALE. Well, I don't want to alarm you, but just at the moment things don't look so good.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Who was just bringing her cup up for a sip, holds it there rigidly*) What?

SENATOR RISDALE. You see, a number of unforeseen things have turned up and—

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Startled, bringing her cup and saucer to meet with a click*) You don't mean to imply that Doctor Chetswold's money is in danger?—Herbert, I warned you!

REV. CHETSWOLD. (*Places his cup back on tray*)

But, Agatha, the Senator was so positive; a sure thing, he said——

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Hah—there's *nothing* sure in speculating—I told you so! If that money is gone, *what* are we going to do? (REVEREND *tries to speak.*) Answer me!

SENATOR RISDALE. Now, now. There is no need to get excited.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Bitterly*) Excited?—Our little *all*—six thousand dollars——

SENATOR RISDALE. *What?* Ten thousand, wasn't it?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Rises sharply*) What was that? *Ten* thousand? (REVEREND *groans.*)

SENATOR RISDALE. Now keep your heads, both of you. You haven't lost your ten thousand yet—and you're not going to—not if I can help it.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. But, *Herbert* . . . you told me it was only six.

REV. CHETSWOLD. (*Gray with alarm*) My love, *please*; you are interrupting the Senator. (*He winces under the pressure.*)

SENATOR RISDALE. We've struck a snag, that's all. Don't worry. Just bear in mind that, if you lose, I lose, and a hell of a lot more than you, too. I beg your pardon, Reverend.

REV. CHETSWOLD. (*Feelingly, almost without the words*) Don't mention it.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Placing her cup on tea tray*) I don't understand it. What's the good of being a political boss if you can't get a bill signed when you want to? You still *are* the leader of the party, aren't you? (*Sits.*)

SENATOR RISDALE. Yes, Madam. And I calculate to remain so. But politics is not all plain sailing; it's a fight, and I have to use whatever weapons



come to my hand in order to get what I want. And get this: whether we win or not in this Park proposition—— (*He leans over arm of chair to direct it to them, L. They all register on his movement*)—depends right now entirely on Mrs. Amaranth.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. On *that* woman?—How, and *why*?

SENATOR RISDALE. If I told you that, you'd know as much as I do, and it wouldn't be good for you. But take it from me, *all* of you, it is *her* attitude that's going to determine which way the cat jumps—for or against us. So it would be mighty bad policy for any of us to get her sore, at this juncture. See the point?

CAROLINE. You mean that Aunt Stella is concerned in your financial affairs?

SENATOR RISDALE. Very much so; that's why I want you all to be as civil and friendly to her as you know how.

CAROLINE. I shan't even speak to her.

WENDHAM. Please, Caroline; you could do that much for my sake.

CAROLINE. For your sake?

WENDHAM. Yes—I am heavily involved . . . I am afraid you and I will have very little money left if this scheme goes wrong.

SENATOR RISDALE. Same here.

CAROLINE. And after what she has done, you expect me to crawl to *her*?

SENATOR RISDALE. She'll meet you halfway. Mrs. Amaranth isn't a bad sort at all. I ask you to be diplomatic with her. Take this engagement like a sport. *She* would.

CAROLINE. I haven't her powers of hypocrisy.

REVEREND CHETSWOLD. HMMMMM. Speaking for myself, I am *entirely* willing to be agreeable to Mrs. Amaranth.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. You needn't overdo it, Doctor Chetswold!

(Auto Horn Off Right)

CAROLINE. *(Rising on the first sound of the horn)*
That's Stanley's car now.

*(SENATOR goes quickly up R., looks out garden door.
REVEREND and MRS. CHETSWOLD rise.)*

REV. CHETSWOLD. *(A step after the SENATOR, then steps back to MRS. CHETSWOLD)* We'd better leave.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Yes, I think we had. *(SENATOR is coming back c.)* Are they back?

SENATOR RISDALE. Yes.

REV. CHETSWOLD. *(Nervously)* Perhaps we'd better go, Agatha.

SENATOR RISDALE. *(Down c.)* No! You stay right where you are.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. But what shall we say—about the engagement?

SENATOR RISDALE. Congratulate 'em. Lay it on thick.

CAROLINE. *(Quickly going up c.)* I think I'll go upstairs, if you'll excuse me.

SENATOR RISDALE. You stay here. Don't spoil my party.

WENDHAM. *(Rises)* Caroline, I beg of you——

CAROLINE. But—I—— Oh, I *can't*.

SENATOR RISDALE. *(Sharply—for a moment the political autocrat. He goes up to CAROLINE and brings her back to the chair she sat in)* Smother your venom, girl. Sit down. All of you. *(All sit.)* You've got to help me out. *(REVEREND sits with his back to audience, looking at SENATOR, who is now at table U.L., between REVEREND and CAROLINE. He has taken the situation in hand and is addressing them all)* And don't all of you look like

you've dropped in to sit up with the corpse. Talk—act natural—and damn it all, *smile!* (*Direct to the REVEREND. REVEREND turns front with an obvious smile. They all assume amiable smirks. SENATOR looks out the garden from where he stands and sees STANLEY and STELLA coming in*) Now when they come in, *pretend* that I have just finished telling you a funny story. (*Looks out again*) Here they are. And that's the funniest thing I ever had happen to me on top of an omnibus. (*SENATOR laughs and they all pick it up in a great spirit of general laughter. CAROLINE'S smile is a deeply wounded one.*)

(*The laughter is at its height as STELLA and STANLEY come in from the garden up right. STANLEY lurks hesitantly in the background. STELLA, on the other hand, exhibits a defiant gaiety—she is braced for a row, and her subsequent reception puzzles her.*)

REV. CHETSWOLD. (*Through the laughter—rises*) Ah, Mrs. Amaranth . . . ! (*WENDHAM rises.*)

SENATOR RISDALE. Hullo. Come on in.

STELLA. (*Brightly—up R.—crosses down R. of c. chair*) Ah! Look, Stanley, the clans are gathering! Well, here we are: the runaways have come back, all braced for the paternal blessing. (*General laughter once again.*)

SENATOR RISDALE. Come on in, Stanley . . . and get it. (*Goes up, and passing CAROLINE he gives her a bracing touch on the shoulder on his way down around L. and D.*)

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*With a syrupy smile*) My dear Mrs. Amaranth. So glad to see you. How do you do?

REV. CHETSWOLD. (*Shaking a roguish finger and crossing in c.*) Charmed to see you, Mrs. Ama-

ranth . . . *charmed*. (*Turning to MRS. CHETSWOLD*) Isn't she looking well?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*She doesn't like the REVEREND'S actions*) Yeahhsss.

REV. CHETSWOLD. Radiant.

STELLA. Thank you, Doctor. (*Turning up to STANLEY*) Stanley, darling, do come in and stop looking so tragic. It isn't at all flattering to me—(*Turning into the scene again*) Do you know, I think I must be psychic. I had a feeling that I'd find you all here. I said to Stanley as we drove along, something tells me that Mrs. Chetswold will be on *the job* . . . (*They all register on this. STELLA corrects herself*) . . . on the premises, I mean. Didn't I, Stanley? (*Nodding her head to him*) Yes. (*STANLEY blubs.*)

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Gushingly*) Needless to say, Mrs. Amaranth—or rather, *Stella*. I may call you *Stella now*, may I not?

STELLA. Why not? This morning you felt at liberty to call me anything you liked.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Ummmm. But that's all *forgotten, now*.

STELLA. Oh, is it?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Yes. Needless to say, my dear, we have heard the good news. (*Nodding her head.*)

STELLA. So soon?

REV. CHETSWOLD. Oh, my, yes. Mrs. Custard telephoned to us.

STELLA. Dear me—I'm covered with confusion.

SENATOR RISDALE. You don't look it!

STELLA. Perhaps not! I'm like that. But just the same I *am*. (*Then to STANLEY*) I begged Stanley not to say anything to the dressmaker. (*To all*) But after all, I suppose it was practical economy to tell her. It will save the expense of announcement cards. (*And then they all guffaw again.*)

After the laugh has gotten under way, WENDHAM slaps STANLEY on the back, much to his surprise.)

MRS. CHETSWOLD. *(Coming out of the laugh)* I am so astounded, dearest Stella, that I find it rather hard to find words to express my congratulations.

STELLA. Then let's consider them said.

REV. CHETSWOLD. *(Unwilling to miss this chance for oratory; in his best pulpit voice)* Ah, no, dearest Stella—for I claim the privilege of calling you Stella, too—— *(He turns and looks to MRS. CHETSWOLD and gets a dirty look—then turns back into scene with a new tone)* Er—that is . . . ahem . . . to you, Stanley, my boy, whom I have known since a kiddie—yea, even as a tiny tot, I feel that on this unlooked for occasion I simply *must* say something appropriate.

STANLEY. *(Hands in pockets—he has come down R.C., looking at REVEREND suspiciously.)* Why?

REV. CHETSWOLD. *(Abashed)* Huh!

STELLA. Hush, darling! That isn't nice.

REVEREND CHETSWOLD. Thank you, Stella, er—Stanley, my boy, from close personal contact with Mrs. Amaranth, I am convinced that she is equipped in every way to make you happy . . . and . . . I sincerely hope that I shall be found worthy to perform the ceremony. *My, what a social event it will be! (Roguishly) Ah, wedding bells! Wedding bells! I seem to hear them now. (With a beaming smile he places a hand at his ear in an attitude of beatific listening. He turns to MRS. CHETSWOLD. She gives him the icy stare and he is crushed right to his chair and sits.)*

CAROLINE. *(Rises)* Will you have tea, Stella?

STELLA. Thanks, no, dear. I must run up and change. Haven't you a few kind words for us, Senator?

SENATOR RISDALE. *(Crossing in to c. to STELLA)*

Sure! You have my best wishes. That is, if you and Stanley are in earnest.

STANLEY. (*Dazed, incredulously, drops down R. of STELLA*) You mean you *consent*?

STELLA. Of course he does. Why shouldn't he consent?

SENATOR RISDALE. I figure that since Stanley and Caroline have agreed to disagree, it's not such a bad thing for the boy to come under the influence of a—thoroughly experienced woman of the world, like *you*—

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Yes—poor Stanley has never known a *mother's* loving care.

STELLA. Well, I'll do my best to make up to him for *all* he has missed so far!

SENATOR RISDALE. Then here's hoping you'll both be as happy as you deserve to be. (*And he goes straight up stage.*)

WENDHAM. Yes, and I feel the same way about it, Stella.

STELLA. (*Taking them all in, right and left*) Thanks, John. I'm deeply grateful to all of you for your good wishes. Stanley, isn't this delightful? (*STANLEY is just right of STELLA—she takes his arm and is standing close to his side*) Smile, dear! Don't stand there looking as though there was a nigger in the woodpile—I'm *sure* . . . there isn't . . . (*Then turns up L. to CAROLINE*) And now, Caroline . . . haven't you anything to say to us?

CAROLINE. (*With an effort*) The only wish I have is for Stanley's good. If he feels that his marriage with *you* is for the best, and you really love him, why, it would be very wrong of me to show any ill-feeling or say anything to hurt either of you. I shan't. I hope *I'm* better than that. Only—be good to him—that's all I ask. I want Stanley to be happy. (*A short silence. STANLEY looks abashed.*)

REVEREND CHETSWOLD. Dear me . . . er—e—ah—this—all this is very affecting . . . (*Turning in his chair U.R. to CAROLINE*) Would you pass the cake, Miss Caroline . . .

STELLA. (*Reading to R.*) Well . . . if you will all excuse me, I *must* tear myself away. (*Reading to L.*) I'm as grimy as the dust-man . . . (*To WENDHAM, down R.*) John, do prove yourself a perfect host by asking the Chetswolds to stay to dinner.

WENDHAM. (*Not with entire graciousness*) Why, certainly . . . (*To CHETSWOLD*) Reverend, would you—

REV. CHETSWOLD. (*Has heard STELLA ask JOHN and so he has only waited for JOHN to say "Will you?" He rises*) Yes, yes. We'd be charmed to, really. And—er—if my friend Wendham still observes his—ah—pre-prohibition customs, I shall take pleasure in drinking to the happy pair.

STELLA. *Fine.* What a dear old sport you are, Doctor.

REV. CHETSWOLD. (*Pleased*) Yes; teeheehee! (*Turns L. and catches sight of his wife's face and grows suddenly solemn—then back to STELLA*) That is, not at all! (*SENATOR crosses around up and down R., front of settee. WENDHAM moves U.R., ready to sit R.C.*)

STELLA. (*Laughing*) Au revoir. See you all later. (*Goes up R. of C. chair, to inside of arch*) Oh, Stanley, dear, my coat! (*STANLEY has coat on his arm, carrying it on at the entrance. He runs up to STELLA, gives it to her and starts back in the room with a little smile.*) Stanley! ! (*With her arms apart—for he has forgotten to kiss her. STANLEY knows what she means, so he returns and with an embrace he kisses her. STELLA is in such a position as to focus her eyes on the SENATOR as they kiss—then she breaks the embrace and runs upstairs.*)

(STANLEY gazes after her until she is out of sight and then with a wide grin he comes down c. to sit c. He does not notice any one nor the change that has taken place on everyone's face since STELLA has gone. They all sit as STELLA leaves. There is an awful silence as they wait for STELLA to get safely out of the way. The air grows chill, and all eyes are turned in stern scrutiny on STANLEY. STANLEY looks first L., with a broad grin, and catches the ice. The REVEREND CHETSWOLD places his glasses to focus more keenly on STANLEY. STANLEY fidgets uneasily under their glare, then he turns to get the same from the other side. He fidgets and then speaks)

(Positions as the group are sitting)

			U.L.
			CAROLINE
R.C.	C.	L.C.	
WENDHAM	STANLEY	REV. C.	
R., SENATOR R.			L., MRS. C.

STANLEY. I think I'll beat it and clean up. (*Rises and starts to go up R.*)

SENATOR RISDALE. (*Harshly*) You'll stay right where you are, young feller. (*After a prolonged glare*) Proud of yourself, aren't you?

STANLEY. (R.C.—*defiantly*) Yes. I am!

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*With almost tearful horror*) Oh, Stanley, you wilful, headstrong boy—*why* did you do it? You and that impudent, brazen creature!

STANLEY. (*Comes to c.*) You might remember that you're talking about my future wife, Mrs. Chetswold.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. *Shame on you!*

STANLEY. I've done nothing to be ashamed of.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. You are ruining your life.

STANLEY. Well, it's *my life*.

SENATOR RISDALE. Not altogether. (STANLEY *turns to* SENATOR *on the word*.) Didn't it ever occur to you that you owed *me* enough respect to consult me before you took such a step?

STANLEY. I knew well enough what you'd say.

SENATOR RISDALE. *Oh*, and you didn't want to hear it.

STANLEY. Hang it, a man's got the right to pick his own wife, hasn't he?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Regardless of public opinion?

STANLEY. Entirely. I am not choosing a wife to please *you* or the neighbors, thank God!

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Such an attitude is positively indecent!

REV. CHETSWOLD. (*Butting in—in his Jeremiah voice*) Take heed, my boy, how you bring your father's gray hairs with sorrow to the grave!

STANLEY. (*Savagely*) Suppose *you* keep out of this!

REV. CHETSWOLD. (*Incredulously—rises*) Are you speaking to *me*?

STANLEY. Yes, I am—when I need any sound advice, *you* are the last one I'll think of applying to.

SENATOR RISDALE. (*Sternly*) Stanley! !

STANLEY. Yes, sir, I mean it—I knew well enough I'd be put on the grill by *you*, Dad, and I'll have to swallow it; but what right has *this* silly wind-bag—

SENATOR RISDALE. (*With a bang*) *That'll do!* (WENDHAM *rises—drops up c.*)

REV CHETSWOLD. (*Falsetto—with outraged indignation*) Woe unto you, young man, to *dare* to call one of the *Lord's* anointed a *windbag*! Woe! Woe!

STANLEY. Say, what do you think I am, a *horse*? (REV. CHETSWOLD *sits, overcome.*)

SENATOR RISDALE. (*Rises and a step to STANLEY*) *Stop this!* I want to ask you, son, in front of these old friends of ours, whether you think you have acted on the level with Caroline and her father?

STANLEY. (*At a loss, he hesitates—goes a step to SENATOR*) I——

CAROLINE. (*Rises and goes down L. of STANLEY*) Let me answer that, please . . . I broke our engagement, voluntarily. Stanley was entirely free to do as he pleased, as far as I am concerned.

SENATOR RISDALE. Are you defending him?

CAROLINE. I am being fair to him; that's all—and please, I don't want to be pitied—really I don't—I—I just can't bear that. It is not Stanley's fault if he doesn't care for me as I care for him . . . it doesn't matter . . . it's quite all right; and I—— (*She suddenly breaks down, covers her face with her hands and gives way to bitter sobs—turning away*) It's all over and done with—but it's all so cruel—I wish I was dead—— (MRS. CHETSWOLD rises.)

STANLEY. (*Awed and repentant, trying to take her hand*) Aw, Caroline, don't. Don't do that—please——

CAROLINE. (*Pulling away from him, hysterically*) Don't touch me——

STANLEY. I'm sorry—honestly I am.

CAROLINE. You needn't be . . . I won't have anyone being sorry for me; I won't, I won't! (*Sobs afresh, goes L. to MRS. CHETSWOLD, who puts her arms around her. STANLEY turns away, looks at his father, who looks in his eye.*)

MRS. CHETSWOLD. My poor——

CAROLINE. I'm not crying on *his* account—or that woman's—I'm crying because I'm a fool—that's all—just a fool!

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Let me take you to your room.

CAROLINE. I want my father——

WENDHAM. (*Going down to her—she goes up to him—they meet down L. of C. chair*) I'm right here, Caroline. (*He folds her in his arms—she clings to him and sobs on his shoulder.*)

CAROLINE. Father, don't let her take you away from me, too! (*STANLEY goes up R. of C. chair, with his back to the scene.*)

WENDHAM. (*Soothing her*) No, no, of course not, dear.

CAROLINE. You're all I've got now. I'll never leave you . . . Oh, please don't go back on me!

WENDHAM. Never in the world, honey. Never, never, *never!* You are all I've got, too, Carrie child. Don't forget that. Now, come along upstairs—you and your old daddy will have a nice long chat together. How's that? (*They start upstairs—he petting her tenderly.*)

CAROLINE. All right. But don't leave me alone. I don't want to be alone! (*They exit.*)

(*The CHETSWOLDS look their sympathy, but awed by STANLEY'S fierceness, they deem it prudent to be silent. After a pause, and WENDHAM and CAROLINE are off, the SENATOR crosses to the REVEREND and STANLEY turns into scene.*)

SENATOR RISDALE. (*R. of REVEREND*) Reverend . . . if you and Mrs. Chetswold wouldn't mind, there's a nice, comfortable seat in the arbor.

REV. CHETSWOLD. (*Rising*) Yes, yes, you want us out of the way. Certainly. Come, Agatha.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Crossing down R., to phone*) First I must telephone Ophelia that we won't be home.

SENATOR RISDALE. (*Crossing down L.*) Go ahead.

STANLEY. (*Starts for the garden*) Well, if that's all, I guess I'll go home and clean up.

SENATOR RISDALE. No, you won't . . . I want to talk to you. (*Sits down L. STANLEY stops R. of c. chair.*)

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*At phone, seated down R.*) Hello . . . Let me have Kiwanis. (REV. CHETSWOLD *starts up L.*) Two-two-two, party W. Please. Yes, thank you. (*Waits—sees the REVEREND CHETSWOLD stealing up L.*) Herbert! (*With an obviously false grin he turns to MRS. CHETSWOLD and comes down c.*) Wait for me in the arbor; and don't stray off—there is something I particularly want to find out from you.

REV. CHETSWOLD. (*Nervously—sensing what it is*) Very well, Agatha. Certainly. Er—whatever knowledge I have is always at your service. (REV. CHETSWOLD *ambles out into the garden up R.*)

(EMMA comes in up R. to remove tea things.)

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Into the phone*) Hello! Is this you, Ophelia? Mrs. Chetswold speaking.—Yes. We won't be home for supper. (EMMA *collecting tea service on tray, on hearing "Won't be home for supper," drops a cup in a saucer and listens with indignant amazement to MRS. CHETSWOLD'S conversation.*) So you needn't cook the hamburger. There's a cold fish cake in the ice box that you might warm up for yourself. You're quite welcome, Ophelia.—Good-bye. (*Hangs up.*)

EMMA. (*Sharply*) Hmmm . . . Did I understand you're all staying for dinner?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Yes, Emma. Mr. Wendham invited us.

EMMA. And on my evening out!

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Mrs. Amaranth ordered a celebration.

EMMA. Mrs. Amaranth ain't boss here yet . . .
Why didn't Miss Caroline tell me?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. She's not feeling well.

EMMA. It's a wonder she ain't down sick in bed,
poor lamb! Humph! Celebration, indeed!

STANLEY. (*Sourly*) Not sore about it, are you,
Emma?

EMMA. (*Vindictively*) I don't want you should
even talk to me, Mr. Stanley Risdale! If I did
what I'd like to, I'd put soap in your *soup* . . .
and that woman's, too, the white-washed sepulchre!
(*Goes out indignantly, carrying tray off R.U.*)

SENATOR RISDALE. There's a small sample of
public opinion for you, young feller! (STANLEY
shrugs impatiently.)

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Rises—starts up R.*) I'll join
the Doctor, if you'll excuse me.

STANLEY. With great pleasure. (*With a huff,*
MRS. CHETSWOLD *exits up R.*)

SENATOR RISDALE. Now, sir, what have you got
to say for yourself?

STANLEY. Not a thing.

SENATOR RISDALE. I want to know if it's straight
goods between you and this lady.

STANLEY. (*Crossing down L.C.*) What do you
mean—straight goods?

SENATOR RISDALE. Are you really serious about
marrying her?

STANLEY. I certainly am.

SENATOR RISDALE. Sure you weren't bamboozled
into it?

STANLEY. Look here, Dad, it's not fair to insinuate
anything like that. Stella is incapable of trickery!

SENATOR RISDALE. Son, the only woman incapable
of trickery in the love game is a *dead* woman!
Well—you weren't roped in, then?

STANLEY. *No!*

SENATOR RISDALE. Humm. You've agreed to overlook the difference in your ages?

STANLEY. Of course . . . What difference does age make?

SENATOR RISDALE. You'll find that out soon enough if you marry her. But that will be *your* funeral, not *mine*. Has the lady told you anything about her mode of life—her varied experiences before she met *you*?

STANLEY. No. She said *you* had full information, and that you would probably give me the benefit of it.

SENATOR RISDALE. (*Amused—pause*) Oh! She said that, did she?

STANLEY. Yes; but let me tell you with all due respect, Dad, that I won't listen to one word derogatory to Mrs. Amaranth.

SENATOR RISDALE. (*Composedly*) You won't have to . . . Not from *me*, anyhow—

STANLEY. (*Slightly bewildered*) Do you mean that you're not going to tell me *anything*?

SENATOR RISDALE. Not a word.

STANLEY. But do you *know* anything about her?

SENATOR RISDALE. Plenty.

STANLEY. Then isn't it my right to be told?

SENATOR RISDALE. Not by me.

STANLEY. But hang it, these *hints* and *innuendoes* are worse than anything you could possibly know or say—

SENATOR RISDALE. Are they?—That's a matter of opinion.

STANLEY. I see what you're up to—you're trying to make me think . . .

SENATOR RISDALE. I admit that. I *am* trying to make you think. (*Rises and goes to STANLEY*) Son, this is the first difference of opinion you and I have ever had. Now understand, I'm not butting into your matrimonial affairs, and mind you, I'm not

saying a word to the detriment of the woman you think you want to marry. I don't approve of the match, for a number of reasons I don't care to enter into—— (*Taking him by the shoulders*) But I don't wish to have you turn on me . . . So I'm keeping mum. That's fair, isn't it?

STANLEY. It's not fair to plant these doubts in my mind.

SENATOR RISDALE. Shucks! If you love the woman as much as you *think* you do, if you simply must have her, be content to take her *as is*. Throw your doubts overboard—if you *can*. Then you'll be happy—*maybe!* (*Crosses L.—sits down L.*)

(MRS. CHETSWOLD *bursts in from the garden up R. in great agitation—she rushes down R. of C. chair—C.*)

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Excuse me for intruding—but—oh!—I'm so upset I don't know what I'm doing.

SENATOR RISDALE. What's the matter?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Doctor Chetswold has just admitted to me that he—— Oh, I'm too humiliated to tell you!

SENATOR RISDALE. What is it?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Stanley, if you don't mind, would you go out and send Doctor Chetswold in here?

STANLEY. (*Glad to escape*) Sure. Where is he?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Out in the garden . . . weeping. (*STANLEY looks to his father. SENATOR RISDALE nods he may go. STANLEY rushes off up R.*)

SENATOR RISDALE. Weeping . . . what about?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Close to hysterics—crossing to L.*) Oh, my gracious, what *shall* I do? What *shall* I do? (*Sits.*)

SENATOR RISDALE. Now, don't give way, Mrs. Chetswold. What's the trouble?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Disgrace!—*Ruin!*—To think that Herbert Chetswold, after the way I've watched him, could do a thing like this behind my back! Oh, ohoooo!

SENATOR RISDALE. Come, come—brace up! What the devil has the Reverend been up to?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Why, he—— *No!* Let *him* confess it.—I am too ashamed. Oh, I wish the earth would open and swallow me up! (*She moans, and the REV. CHETSWOLD, in obvious trepidation, enters up R. with handkerchief to eyes, crosses down C.*)

REV. CHETSWOLD. (*Coming in*) Yes, Agatha . . . ?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Rises*) Here he is!

REV. CHETSWOLD. (*Down C., front of C. chair*) Yes . . . Agatha . . . here I am.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Stonily*) Sit down in that chair! (*Points dramatically to C. chair—MRS. CHETSWOLD ready to sit.*)

REV. CHETSWOLD. I'll sit anywhere you say, my dear, of course. (*Seats himself. She sits.*)

SENATOR RISDALE. Well, Reverend, what's wrong?—Out with it. (*REV. CHETSWOLD makes a few throat-catching groans.*)

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Tell Senator Risdale what you told *me!*

REV. CHETSWOLD. (*Finally gets his throat so that it will speak—reluctantly*) Well—you see—the fact is, Senator—when you so kindly offered to invest our little savings—in a sure thing—we had only six thousand dollars.

SENATOR RISDALE. What?!

REV. CHETSWOLD. Yes; quite so. And as you considered the investment absolutely safe, I took the liberty of *borrowing* four thousand dollars from the organ fund, of which I am treasurer——

SENATOR RISDALE. (*Slowly rise . . . amazed*)

You mean to say you juggled with the church money?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. *Yes.*—But without telling *me* about it, mind that!

REV. CHETSWOLD. But it was lying idle in the bank, and I thought that if I used it we might have the new organ that much sooner; it wasn't for myself, you understand. I wanted to surprise the congregation!

MRS. CHETSWOLD. I think you're going to *surprise them* beyond your wildest dreams. (*Rise and to SENATOR*) Now do you see the position, Senator? If you let anything go wrong with our investment, not only will we lose the money that I have scrimped and denied myself all these years to save, but Doctor Chetswold will be held up to public scorn as a defaulter! (*Goes to D.R.*)

SENATOR RISDALE. Well, madam, you can't blame me for that.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Still going*) Ohhhh, ohhhh! What shall I do? What can I do? (*Sits settee D.R.*) It's a dreadful thing to think that I have lived to see this day!

REV. CHETSWOLD. (*Miserably*) *Yes!*—isn't it?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Herbert, don't be a fool!

REV. CHETSWOLD. No, Agatha—certainly not.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Senator, you got us into this. You must do something.

SENATOR RISDALE. (*Crosses in to L.C.*) What do you expect me to do?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Couldn't you take over our investment and give us back the money?

SENATOR RISDALE. No. The truth is, I'm in this thing financially up to my ears, myself. (*They both groan.*) Now don't lose your heads. I'm fighting tooth and nail . . .

MRS. CHETSWOLD. You shouldn't have to fight. If you can't control the Governor whom you elected

twice, Herbert and I have been grossly deceived in you.

SENATOR RISDALE. Don't assume all that too quickly, madam.

REV. CHETSWOLD. Agatha, calm yourself. All is not lost.

(SENATOR RISDALE *crosses to* MRS. CHETSWOLD. STELLA *starts over the stairs and comes D.L., beautifully dressed in a glittering décolleté evening gown. She overhears the last of* MRS. CHETSWOLD'S *tirade.*)

SENATOR RISDALE. Of course it isn't, and I don't see any occasion for all this hullabaloo.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Turning on him desperately*) Oh, you *don't*? Here we are, frantic—with shame and ruin staring us in the face—and *you*, the author of it all, refuse to lift a finger! (*STELLA has arrived on stage.*) Oh, if I could only be a wicked woman for *once* in my life——

STELLA. (*D.L. of c. chair*) Am I intruding? (*REV. CHETSWOLD rises with an "Oh!"*) Is anything wrong?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Rises*) Yes, Mrs. Amaranth, there *is* something wrong,—and you might be able to help us.

STELLA. Yes?—*How?*

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Do you know about the State Park Bill that has gone to the Governor for his signature?

STELLA. Not a thing in the world.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. The Senator said you did.

SENATOR RISDALE. (*Right at her*) I said nothing of the kind, madam, and you'd be wiser to keep your hands off and let me handle the matter!

MRS. CHETSWOLD. What for? *You* are stumped. You practically admitted it. (*Crosses to R. of REV.*

EREND. SENATOR *drop D.R.*) Mrs. Amaranth, our difficulty is this. Dr. Chetswold, on Senator Risdale's advice, bought some land along the Kiwanis River, where the proposed Park was to be——

REV. CHETSWOLD. (*With deep pathos*) I bought the very spot where they meant to put the Zoo!

STELLA. Yes—well?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Well, if the Governor won't sign the bill, there won't *be* any park, and we will be left high and dry with a lot of unsaleable land on our hands!

STELLA. (*Crossing to sit down L.*) So! Then it's awfully mean of the Governor not to sign it. Why won't he?

SENATOR RISDALE. (*D.R.*) He intends to veto that bill to spite *me*.

STELLA. That's strange. I thought you and he were as thick as thieves!

SENATOR RISDALE. You ought to know better than anyone what he holds against me.

STELLA. (*After a thought*) Oh! Is *that* it?

SENATOR RISDALE. Yes.

STELLA. Well, even so, what can I do about it?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Crosses L. to STELLA in easy position to sit in chair L.*) You are a friend of Governor Ogilvie's; if we count on your influence——

STELLA. Aren't you assuming a good deal?—I have no influence with the man.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Sits*) Oh, don't let us beat about the bush. I must throw myself on your mercy, Mrs. Amaranth. Doctor Chetswold is on the verge of disgrace!

STELLA. Disgrace?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. In addition to his own savings, he very foolishly and *wickedly* used some of the Church funds.

STELLA. (*Serious*) Without their knowing?

REV. CHETSWOLD. (*Almost in tears*) I did it for the *organ*, my dear Stella—I meant everything for the best.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Now, do you see? Oh, I beseech you, I appeal to you as one woman to another to help us if you can.

STELLA. I'm sorry, but how can I interfere in political matters?—After all, I am only a woman.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Men seem to find you a most attractive one. (*The Rev. thinks so too.*)

STELLA. Do go on, Mrs Chetswold, since you admit that I *am* an attractive woman, what then?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Why, my dear Stella,—(*With bowed head*)—surely you have enough worldly experience to know how to—I am at loss just how to express it——

STELLA. To *vamp* the Governor? Is that what you mean?

REV. CHETSWOLD. Ahem—— I think that phrase covers it, Agatha.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. It puts it rather crudely.

STELLA. Oh, do let's be crude and entirely frank with each other. Why not? Are *you* asking me to do this, Senator?

SENATOR RISDALE. *I am not!* I suggest that you and I talk this matter over privately.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. *Why?*—— It's not a private matter between you. It's our business, too!

SENATOR RISDALE. (*Losing his temper at last*) That will *do!* I have stood about all of this I'm going to!

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Astonished and a bit cowed by his change of front*) Why——

SENATOR RISDALE. Keep out of it, I tell you. Reverend, kindly take your wife away.

REV. CHETSWOLD. Yes; yes, certainly . . . (*Goes to Mrs. CHETSWOLD*) But what shall I do with her?

SENATOR RISDALE. That's your problem, not mine. Take her outdoors—*down cellar*—go home, if you want to.

REV. CHETSWOLD. But I *don't* want to. We were invited for dinner.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Much insulted. Rise*) Come, Herbert! We *will* go home.

STELLA. (*Rise*) Oh, you mustn't do that. Why not sit in the library while we discuss what it's best to do?

REV. CHETSWOLD. (*Approaching Mrs. CHETSWOLD, timidly*) Yes, Agatha, let us give these keen intelligences a chance to focus on our little problem.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. It's a pity you didn't give your *wife* a chance to do a little focusing, for you, before you got yourself into this mess.

REV. CHETSWOLD. But my dear, I assure you, I *did it all for the organ!*

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Ugh! I've no patience with you! (*Sweeps out. REVEREND holds, then bow to STELLA, then to SENATOR RISDALE and exit U.U.R.*)

SENATOR RISDALE. (*Has crossed to chair L.*) Now, Mrs. Amaranth.—I guess you've gathered that we're all more or less in a hole.

STELLA. Then it *is* serious?

SENATOR RISDALE. God!—I should think so! (*Pointedly and meaning every syllable*) Mrs. Amaranth, the Governor has *got to sign that bill!*

STELLA. Granted. But where do I come in?

SENATOR RISDALE. You still have Ogilvie's letters, haven't you?

STELLA. Well, what if I have?

SENATOR RISDALE. Then maybe you and I could make a dicker. If you would just turn those letters over to *me*—I could use 'em as a club to make Ogilvie come to terms.

STELLA. Ummmmmmmm! *Blackmail! !*

SENATOR RISDALE. *Rot!*—I'll make it worth your while!

STELLA. What an ethical proposition!

SENATOR RISDALE. My dear madam, I can't afford to be ethical—this is politics.

STELLA. Oh, yes,—I forgot.—You are a *statesman*! What I can't get over is that, after what you did to *me* once, you have the nerve to expect me to toss away my reputation, to pull *your* chestnuts out of the fire.—Why should I do anything for *you*?

SENATOR RISDALE. It's *not* altogether for me. (STELLA *laughs*.) How about your brother-in-law, and Stanley?

STELLA. Now you are trying to work on my feelings, but it won't do.

SENATOR RISDALE. No, *no*.—I'm simply throwing myself on your mercy. Believe it or not, Mrs. Amaranth, I have admired you sincerely ever since the first time we met.

STELLA. (*Chuckling*) You wretch! I believe you are trying to flirt with me!

SENATOR RISDALE. No.—I assure you, on my honor! (STELLA *mockingly grimaces and with a raised finger she tells him to "come to the point."*) I'll give you fifteen thousand dollars, *cash*, for Ogilvie's letters.—Take it or leave it. (STELLA *bursts into a mocking laugh*.) What are you laughing at?

STELLA. My dear Senator, I'm afraid luck is against you.—I burned Horace Ogilvie's love letters.

SENATOR RISDALE. (*Leaping to his feet*) You burned 'em? ?

STELLA. Yes.—The moment I discovered that you were after them.

SENATOR RISDALE. Well . . . why?—What for—

STELLA. I naturally imagined that you were acting for Ogilvie.

SENATOR RISDALE. Is this—on the level?

STELLA. Absolutely. (SENATOR crosses to c. *The shock carries him out of the picture.*)

SENATOR RISDALE. (c.) Well . . . I guess that means my finish!

STELLA. (*Rises and goes U.L., to leave*) So far as I'm concerned, it does.

SENATOR RISDALE. (*With a start*) No!—No, by God! (STELLA stops; turns back to SENATOR.) I'm not licked yet! There is still Mrs. Chetswold's plan!

STELLA. (U.L.) What plan?

SENATOR RISDALE. That woman isn't such a fool, after all . . . (*Turning to STELLA*) I dare say Ogilvie is still crazy about you.

STELLA. Suppose he is?—What then?

SENATOR RISDALE. You could wind him around your finger if you wanted to—— (*And he winds his finger around in illustration.*)

STELLA. But I *don't* happen to want to.

SENATOR RISDALE. Why not?—He would be only too glad to make up with you—(*Quietly but with force*)—on the quiet!

STELLA. (*Comes D. sharply, L. of SENATOR*) Are you suggesting that I become this man's *mistress* for your benefit?

SENATOR RISDALE. Not at all.—I know you better than that.—But you two can be *friends*, can't you?

STELLA. You know men like Ogilvie don't give favors without a return.

SENATOR RISDALE. Well, you are smart enough to get around *that* when the time comes. Couldn't you,—lead him on? Let him think——

STELLA. I wonder what Stanley would say to this unconventional proposition of yours!

SENATOR RISDALE. (*Snappingly*) He's got nothing to do with it.

STELLA. He might object—and as his future wife I would have to abide by his wishes.

SENATOR RISDALE. Don't let that worry you.—You are *not* his future wife!

STELLA. *Ah!*—So you've changed your tune, have you?

SENATOR RISDALE. You know blamed well that it won't do.

STELLA. *Why?*—Don't you think I am good enough for *him*, either?

SENATOR RISDALE. You are good enough for *any* man. But what would you want with a kid like that? It's ridiculous. Besides, you're not in love with him. You deliberately dazzled the boy, to get my goat, and, in addition to that, you've been through the marriage mill twice——

STELLA. Well—go on. What else have you against me? In your snooping into my private affairs, did you find one single thing to my discredit?

SENATOR RISDALE. *No.*

STELLA. You see, my dear man, I happen to have a *code*, too!

SENATOR RISDALE. I am not asking you to do anything out of the way. You are down and out, financially, and now that you're broke, all your fair weather friends have dropped you. You are fighting for existence with your back to the wall. I am willing to pay, and pay well, for anything you may do for me. *But I am not going to give you my boy—not by a damned sight!!* (*Goes U.C.* STELLA, *crosses D.R.*)

STELLA. (*D.R.*) I see. Well, now that *your* cards are on the table—(*SENATOR comes D.C.*)—let me tell *you* something. I dare say I *can* help you out of the fix you are in. I imagine I could make Horace Ogilvie do whatever I wanted him to, if I tried;—and *if* I *do* try, you *are* going to pay—you and a number of other people in this salubrious vicinity!

SENATOR RISDALE. I am willing to talk terms.

STELLA. Not until Stanley gets here.

SENATOR RISDALE. It isn't necessary for him to know anything about this.

STELLA. Pardon me, I am engaged to him, whether you like it or not. And I consider it my duty to let him know just what—(EMMA enters U.R.)—my future father-in-law has planned for me to do.

EMMA. (*In arch c.*) Hasn't Miss Caroline come down yet?

STELLA. No.—She is still upstairs.

EMMA. I wanted to find out if cocktails is to be served before dinner.

SENATOR RISDALE. I can answer that.—They *are*!

EMMA. I'll have to get the keys, then, from Mr. Wendham.

SENATOR RISDALE. Well, *get 'em*.

STELLA. And will you ask them both if they'll come down here as soon as they can?

EMMA. Yes, ma'am. (*Exit over stairs.*)

SENATOR RISDALE. So to get even with me, you mean to try to get me in wrong with my boy. That's not worthy of you, Mrs. Amaranth.

STELLA. One must fight fire with fire—(STANLEY enters U.R. *Has changed to dinner clothes*)—my dear Senator.

STANLEY. (U.R.C.) Hullo . . .

STELLA (*Turns and goes U. to STANLEY*) Ah, Stanley, dear!—How nice and how young you look. (*Embrace. Kiss—break*) Darling!

STANLEY. (*Gleeful*) So do you.

SENATOR RISDALE. (*Disgusted*) Uhhh!

STELLA. Darling, we've got the Chetswolds shut up in the library. Would you mind letting them out?

STANLEY. All right, if you say so. Personally,

I'd just as soon have them shut up. (*Runs out U.U.R.*)

SENATOR RISDALE. So this is to be a showdown?

STELLA. (*Comes D.R. again*) It is.

SENATOR RISDALE. Is it *fair*, do you think, to turn my own son against me?

STELLA. Isn't it a trifle fantastic for a cold-blooded, unprincipled scamp like you to talk of fairness?

SENATOR RISDALE. That's strong language, Mrs. Amaranth.

STELLA. *Mild* to what I may use, if you drive me to it, Senator Risdale! I am being *fair* to *myself*, for a change—and I am really rather enjoying the sensation.

(*Enter U.U.R. REV. CHETSWOLD, MRS. CHETSWOLD following, STANLEY trailing. The CHETSWOLDS are anxious and eager. REVEREND goes to D.L., MRS. CHETSWOLD U. of him, both in easy position to sit on L. settee. STANLEY to chair L. of C. chair.*)

SENATOR RISDALE. I absolutely *forbid* you, madam, to drag those two youngsters into this affair.

STELLA. Do you?—Then let me see you try to stop me!

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*The CHETSWOLDS have arrived to places*) Have you come to any decision, Stella?

STELLA. I think so. John and Caroline will be here directly—then we can talk *terms*!

MRS. CHETSWOLD. *Terms?*

STELLA. Why, yes. You didn't expect me to mix myself up in this unsavory affair for *nothing*, did you?

REV. CHETSWOLD. But, my dear lady,—we can't

afford, really—— (*EMMA has come D. stairs. REVEREND sees her and subsides. EMMA starts on.*)

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Coldly*) Do I understand that you wish *money* for helping us out of our trouble?

STELLA. Yes.—I expect to be paid with interest for a good many things I've had to swallow.

STANLEY. (*Completely at sea*) Say,—what is all this?

(*CAROLINE, with WENDHAM following, comes in over stairs, both dressed in evening clothes.*

CAROLINE goes D. to sit on settee D.R. and WENDHAM to settee U.R.)

STELLA. Be patient, Stanley.—You'll know everything in a few minutes.

WENDHAM. (*Stepping out of arch*) Have we kept you waiting? (*CAROLINE and WENDHAM continue to walk and are now in easy position to sit as above.*)

STELLA. Oh, no. Shall we sit down? (*To SENATOR*) Or would you rather face the situation standing, Senator? (*SENATOR RISDALE indicates that they all seat themselves. They do so.*)

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Before sitting*) Surely you don't propose to discuss our problems in front of these young people?

STELLA. Certainly.—You can trust them, I'm sure. (*MRS. CHETSWOLD sits.*) Now, Caroline, would you tell anybody if you knew that the Reverend Chetswold had stolen some money?

REV. CHETSWOLD. (*Aghast*) Stolen? Ohhhh, noooo!

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Rises*) I protest!—How dare you insinuate——

STELLA. Sit down and keep cool. (*Away from*

MRS. CHETSWOLD *and to CAROLINE again*) Answer the question, Caroline. Would you tell?

CAROLINE. No. I don't think I would.

STELLA. Would *you*, Stanley?

STANLEY. Certainly not. I'd be struck dumb with surprise that he had the nerve. (*To REVEREND abruptly*) What'd you steal? (*REVEREND sighs and Oh's and is terribly crestfallen.*)

STELLA. Nothing.—The Doctor didn't steal, children.—He merely speculated with the church's funds. Quite all right, unless he is found out. Then they have a nasty name for it, called embezzlement!

REV. CHETSWOLD. (*Rises*) Embezzle . . . no, nooooo! (*Almost crying.*)

STELLA. (*To the REVEREND*) Sit down . . . Sit down! (*He sits. To STANLEY*) Now, Stanley, if Governor Ogilvie vetoes the State Park Bill, it means bankruptcy for your father, you understand that?

STANLEY. Yep.

STELLA. And it means the end of your father's political prestige and power.

STANLEY. I guess they'd all turn on him fast enough.

STELLA. Well, then, you see the situation is desperate.

STANLEY. Yeah . . . !

STELLA. Now, a way out has been suggested, and it seems to be up to *me*.

STANLEY. (*Puzzled*) Oh, they want you to be a lobbyist?

STELLA. Mm—*no*. I've never heard it called *that*.

STANLEY. I don't get it. I wish you'd explain, Dad.

SENATOR RISDALE. The lady has the floor.

STELLA. The lady will willingly yield to the Senator.

SENATOR RISDALE. No, thanks.

STELLA. You see, Stanley,—I used to know the Governor—Ogilvie—rather well, and I am told he still has a very warm regard for *me*. Your father and Mrs. Chetswold think I could persuade him to *do anything*, provided I am willing to submit to his attentions—if you get what I mean——!

STANLEY. (*Leaping up*) My God! I never heard of such a rotten proposition in my life! Did you think I would consent to your doing such a thing?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. But Stanley dear——

STANLEY. You keep out of this. (*To STELLA*) You couldn't—you wouldn't lower yourself——

STELLA. Oh, but the Senator offers to *pay* me——

STANLEY. Worse and more of it. They got themselves into this mess. Let them wiggle out of it the best way they can!

MRS. CHETSWOLD. But Stanley, do you realize——

STANLEY. I realize that you and your husband are a couple of pious humbugs!

REV. CHETSWOLD. (*Up with a start*) You impious vessel of sounding brass! Have you no respect for my cloth?

STANLEY. *No!*—You're a disgrace to it.—You old hypocrite. How would you like your congregation to know that, to cover up *your* larceny, you are trying to induce a decent woman to prostitute herself?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Leaping to her feet*) How dare you use such a word in my presence?

REV. CHETSWOLD. This is defamation!

STELLA. Come to order. Now, Caroline . . .

REV. CHETSWOLD. *Wait!*—Pardon *me!* Please. (*Crosses in to STELLA*) There is a misapprehension here. Surely, Mrs. Amaranth, you didn't think we were asking you to—to, why—to do, if you,—that—earrrrrr . . . The point is—I want to inquire,

being sadly ignorant of such matters,—isn't there such a thing as *platonic vamping*?

STELLA. Not among the better classes, Doctor.

REV. CHETSWOLD. (*Crestfallen, crosses back to his place*) Oh!—I see.—Too bad!—Regrettable, really.

STELLA. What do you say, Caroline?

CAROLINE. I think Stanley is right.—They have no right to ask you to do such a thing.—And I am sure my father feels the same way about it.

STELLA. Let's see if he does.—What is your opinion, John?

WENDHAM. I wouldn't presume to advise you, Stella. I'm sure your own conscience and judgment will lead you to do the right thing.

STELLA. Still the same old slippery John!

WENDHAM. Not at all.

STELLA. John votes a timid and half-hearted yes. That decides it.

WENDHAM. (*Rises*) I am not voting at all.—It is silly to play with us like this. Why don't you either say you will help us, or drop it?

CAROLINE. (*Shocked*) Father!!

WENDHAM. (*Irritably*) Do you want to lose your home and everything we've got? Have you any conception of what genteel poverty means?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Well, I have; and it's the refinement of misery! (*WENDHAM sits.*)

REV. CHETSWOLD. Yes—it is—it is!

SENATOR RISDALE. Quit whipping the devil around the stump, Mrs. Amaranth. If you've decided to help us out, suppose you talk terms.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Yes. How much are you expecting to hold us up for?

STELLA. (*After a thought*) I would want an option on *all* the Kiwanis River real estate you people hold.

SENATOR RISDALE. What—'s the idea of that?

STELLA. So that I could inform Governor Ogilvie, truthfully, that you are no longer interested in the property. It might help me.

SENATOR RISDALE. Okay.—What else?

STELLA. (*With perfect calm*) One-half of *all* the profits.

REV. CHETSWOLD. (*Springs up*) My gracious!

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Leaping out of her seat*) Utterly outrageous!!

SENATOR RISDALE. Hold your horses, will you? (*The CHETSWOLDS sit—then to STELLA again*) That's pretty steep, Mrs. Amaranth.

STELLA. That's my *price*!

SENATOR RISDALE. (*To WENDHAM*) Well, what do you think, John?

WENDHAM. What else can we do?

SENATOR RISDALE. Not a damned thing—that I can see. If Mrs. Amaranth gets us out of this, she is entitled to payment. (*To the REVEREND*) Reverend?

REV. CHETSWOLD. Whatever you say, Senator.

SENATOR RISDALE. (*Rising as if it is all settled*) Then we'll consider the matter settled.

STANLEY. (*Bursting out furiously like a crack from a whip*) No!! By God, it isn't settled!! I have something to say.

SENATOR RISDALE. (*Angry but controlled*) Son, you keep out of this.—Mind your business——

STANLEY. This *is* my business. (*To STELLA*) Stella, you *can't* do this.—I *forbid* it.

STELLA. Stanley dear, you are in a hopeless minority.

STANLEY. Have you forgotten that we're engaged? Don't you care for me, or were you just fooling me all along?

STELLA. Yes, yes;—I was merely playing with you, dear boy;—but the game is over. Here—— (*Giving him his ring*) I'm afraid I haven't the

right to wear it. I don't love you at all. Not one bit.

STANLEY. You can't throw me over like this. Do you think I'd be such a rotter as to give you up, just because you are unselfish and noble enough to——

SENATOR RISDALE. *Son*,—the lady is right. Don't you see, as things stand, you *can't* marry her?

STANLEY. I *will* marry her, whether she goes through with this rotten proposal or yours or not. I'll marry her in spite of whatever disgrace you and your crooked schemes may lead her into!

SENATOR RISDALE. (*Angrily*) You are talking like a damned fool! !

STANLEY. Well, since you make me say it, sir, *you* are acting like a damned scoundrel! ! (MRS. CHETSWOLD *rises*. *The father and son glare at each other for a few seconds. The father weakens.*)

SENATOR RISDALE. (*With a sad note—he is taken back*) I—I—well—I didn't expect that from *you*, my boy.

STANLEY. (*Not set back at all*) I'm sorry, sir; but I mean it. The whole business is horrible, shocking!

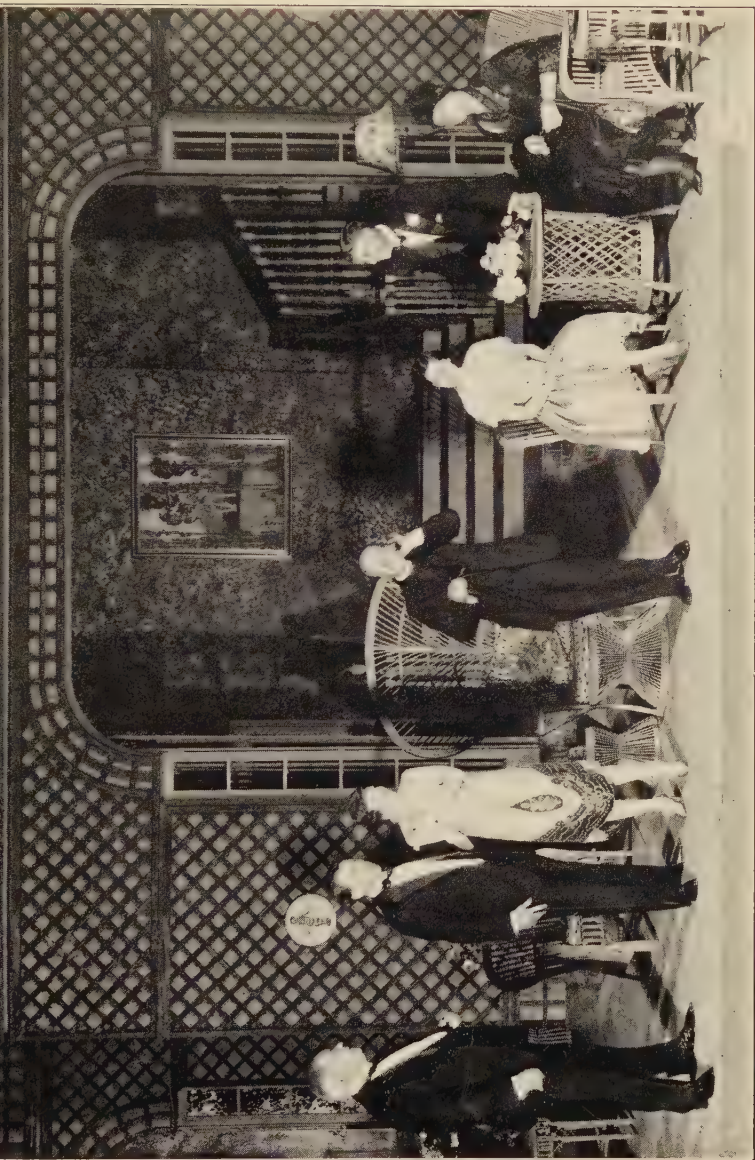
MRS. CHETSWOLD. What is so shocking about it? Mrs. Amaranth is demanding a *price* for her services, isn't she?

STANLEY. Will you please keep quiet?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*A step to STANLEY*) I'll do nothing of the kind.—Surely you don't suppose she is a *novice* in such matters.

STELLA. (*The scene comes to an abrupt pause. Slowly and deliberately STELLA turns to MRS. CHETSWOLD and reads*) What do you mean by that?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Whipping at her again*) Just what I say!—You have certainly demonstrated



to us in this community that you know how to *sell* your physical appeal!

STANLEY. *My God*——

SENATOR RISDALE. *Stanley!*

STELLA. (*Quietly with force*) After that remark, you may get yourselves out of your difficulties the best way you can.

SENATOR RISDALE. You don't mean that!

STELLA. I certainly *do!*

SENATOR RISDALE. But look here——

STELLA. (*With finality*) *No!*

SENATOR RISDALE. (*Furiously to* MRS. CHETSWOLD) Damn it, woman! Do you see what you've done? Why can't you keep a civil tongue in your head?

REV. CHETSWOLD. You ought to apologize, Agatha.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Turning on the REVEREND*) *I won't!*—I said nothing but the truth!

SENATOR RISDALE. (*In a frenzy*) For God's sake, madam—dry up! !

STELLA. Let her talk. Oh, it's too ghastly to think that, after subjecting me to every possible insult, this sanctimonious Pharisee should ask me deliberately to arouse the passions of a married man! To surrender myself to him—body and *soul!*

REV. CHETSWOLD. Oh, my gracious! (*Turns out of the scene.*)

MRS. CHETSWOLD. How dare you impute such intentions to *me?*

STELLA. I dare because it is true—and you know it. I *could* have saved you, but *now* nothing on earth would make me stir one step!

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Crosses over to* STELLA) You are being very clever, aren't you? Trying to thrust the blame on *me*. But it can't be done. You would be only too eager to have an affair with a

man like Governor Ogilvie, but you don't dare risk it!—You are *afraid* to go!!

STELLA. (*Drawing herself up*) *Afraid?*

MRS. CHETSWOLD. You know the Governor wouldn't look at you. You are refusing to help us because you *know* you are headed straight for the shelf! (STELLA *gasps in speechless rage.*) In your heart you know you are *passée*!—Done for!—Finished—*Through!* !—You are nothing but a *has been!* !

STELLA. *A has been*, am I? (*To SENATOR and down to him*) Senator Risdale, I'll get your bill signed for you—for one reason, to keep these two youngsters from losing all the money they've got—but *also and chiefly*, my good woman, *to show you how far I am from being passée.* (*And then with a choking under, she continues.*) I'm not on the shelf yet, not by a long shot! And in spite of the snapping and snarling of all the jealous hags in Christendom, I'm not going there, until I get *damned good and ready!* !

(STELLA *moves upstage turning out of the scene, which takes all in the scene to a move to follow her with a turn upstage as the curtain falls.* STELLA *is just ascending the steps in the arch and all on stage are in fixed positions, having at the most moved but one step. They are all held by her sudden turn and exit.*)

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT III

SCENE: *Same set. Four days later, about nine-thirty in the evening.*

AT RISE: *The stage is empty. STELLA is seen coming through garden entrance left to outside door. The stage is lighted only by the moonlight and a shaded table lamp.*

STELLA rings bell at door and EMMA enters from up Upper Right, crosses through arch and opens door. STELLA enters.

A pause and EMMA's voice is heard off stage.

EMMA. Well, of all things!—Mrs. Amaranth! So you're back?

STELLA. *(Comes through hall, and at c. of arch stops and turns back to answer EMMA)* Leave my bag right where it is, Emma.

EMMA. *(Off stage)* Yes, ma'am.

(STELLA goes to light switch Right of arch—presses button. Lights up. STELLA is simply dressed in a dark tailored suit. She seems tired and dejected. Glancing around the room and finding it empty, she removes her hat, tosses it on the table before her Up Left—then she looks in the mirror L., gives her hair a few pats and studies herself intently a few seconds. Evidently not particularly pleased with her reflection, she turns away with a shrug and a gesture of discontent. Crosses to door R. EMMA enters and comes in to C.L. of C. chair.)

EMMA. Mr. Wendham was beginning to think you had run away for good, ma'am.

STELLA. (*Listlessly*) Really?—How absurd!

EMMA. That's what I said.—Not a chance, I says to him, when he was worrying and fretting.—And I was right, as usual.

STELLA. Where is everybody?

EMMA. Mr. Wendham is over to the Senator's—Miss Caroline is lying down;—moping, I guess—she hasn't been herself at all, ma'am.

STELLA. Is she ill?

EMMA. Not exactly ill—just down in the mouth. If you ask me, I thinks it's a broken heart.

STELLA. No one ever died of that complaint.

EMMA. Well do I know that from my own experience.

STELLA. (*Bored*) Indeed?— You surprise me.

EMMA. (*Defensively*) Oh, I've had my share of affairs of the heart—— (*Proudly*) I was deserted at the altar once—— You wouldn't believe that, now, would you?

STELLA. Why not? It seems entirely credible.

EMMA. (*Pleased*) Yes, ma'am—he was a fireman—and oh, what a butterfly.

STELLA. (*Rises—crosses to c.*) Tell me about it some other time, Emma. I'm desperately tired.

EMMA. Are you going up to your room now?

STELLA. No. If you don't mind, will you run upstairs and tell Miss Caroline that I'd like to see her for a few minutes, if she feels well enough.

EMMA. (*Sore at having her reminiscences cut short*) Oh, very good, ma'am. (*EMMA exits over stairs, taking STELLA'S hat, gloves, etc., with her. STELLA goes to phone.*)

STELLA. (*D.R. Thinks a minute, then sits and removes receiver*) Hello. Will you give me Kiwanis 5400, please?—Hello. Is Senator Risdale there?—

Mrs. Amaranth speaking. *Oh!*—Why, is that you? Stanley, my dear, I didn't recognize your voice.—Of course I'm back;—right here in dear, dear Kiwanisport;—got in on the nine-fifteen. Tell your father and John I've arrived, then hop in your car *and get here first*. I can't tell you, Stanley. I can't tell you over the telephone. No;—I'm *not* being mysterious. (*CAROLINE has come over the stairs and is now in view.*) Come on over;—*hurry!* (*Hangs up receiver.* CAROLINE comes D.L. of C. chair slowly.)

CAROLINE. (*Coldly*) How do you do, Aunt Stella?

STELLA. (*Advancing to her cordially with outstretched hand*) My dear Caroline—

CAROLINE. (*Ignoring her hand*) It isn't necessary to pretend with each other, is it? We are quite alone, you know.

STELLA. (*Chilled*) How you do hate me, don't you?

CAROLINE. No.—I don't hate you. (*Right in STELLA's eyes*) I thoroughly disapprove of you.—That's all.

STELLA. I'm sorry for that. I'd rather have your good opinion, of course.

CAROLINE. I don't imagine *my* opinion matters much to you.

STELLA. It won't after tonight, for I am going away. I intend to take your father's advice and go back to Europe, where I belong.

CAROLINE. I think you are very wise.

STELLA. Yes,—but before I go, I'd like to feel that you have forgiven me. Have you and Stanley made up?

CAROLINE. No.

STELLA. Aren't you going to forgive him?

CAROLINE. Never.

STELLA. Caroline, you love the boy, you know you do.

CAROLINE. (*Crosses to sit D.L. Sits, looks front.*) The boy I loved was someone else—a creature of my own imagination, not the cad Stanley proved himself to be.

STELLA. (*A step L.*) If I could assure you that the whole engagement was a joke—wouldn't it induce you to change your attitude toward him?

CAROLINE. What do you mean?

STELLA. Your unreasonable jealousy practically forced poor Stanley into my arms. He cared nothing for me. He was hurt by the things you did to him—and don't forget you had just called me a fast woman! I was smarting under that insult, and so I indulged in the luxury of a mean little revenge.

CAROLINE. I do hate you, now.

STELLA. (*With a shrug*) I'll have to bear that, I suppose. But do try to understand that Stanley isn't to blame.

(STANLEY is at outside door, ringing bell.)

STELLA. I fancy that's Stanley now.

CAROLINE. (*Rises, crosses C. and U. STELLA would stop her*) Oh! Then if you'll excuse me, I'll go to my room.

STELLA. (*Intercepting her*) No, no.—Don't go, I beg you.

CAROLINE. I don't wish to see him.

STELLA. (*Desperately*) Caroline, for God's sake, be sensible.—I insist that you talk things over with Stanley. You owe me that much,—after the sacrifice I made.

CAROLINE. What sacrifice have you made?

STELLA. Caroline! Do you think that humiliating trip to the Capital involved no sacrifice of pride and self-respect on my part? (*STELLA is keeping back a tear as she crosses D.R.*)

STANLEY. (*Off U.L. EMMA has opened the door*)

Mrs. Amaranth sent for me. . . . Where is she?

EMMA. (*Off*) She's in the sun-parlor.

(*STANLEY bursts in with enthusiastic eagerness, his eyes gleaming and his hands extending greeting. CAROLINE drops D.L. a little. She is trapped and stands moodily with her back to both of them. STELLA speaks the following lines with almost hysterical gaiety. STANLEY in through arch and direct to STELLA D.R.*)

STANLEY. *Stella!*—Gee, but I'm glad to see you!

STELLA. So am I—to see you,—but look, Stanley,—here is Caroline, dying to make up with you,—just as I know you are dying to make up with her.

STANLEY. Why—

STELLA. (*Rattling on feverishly*) I've been telling Caroline about the joke we played on her—

STANLEY. What joke?

STELLA. Our trial engagement. She never suspected that we did it to make her realize how much she cared for you! How we laughed about it. Didn't we?

STANLEY. Laughed?—What about?

STELLA. I'm afraid we went a little too far. I have apologized. Now you tell her how sorry you are, and say you'll never do it again—

STANLEY. But—wait a minute—

STELLA. (*Fervently signalling to him her distress*) Please!—Please! !

(*STANLEY, after staring at STELLA for a moment, perplexed, perceives that she is deadly earnest. He hesitates, then goes over to CAROLINE, who keeps her back turned.*)

STANLEY. I didn't mean to hurt you, Caroline. If I did, I'm sorry. (*A pause. No answer.*) Look

around, won't you? (*He fishes the engagement ring out of his side coat pocket*) Look! Here is your ring. It's awful lonesome not being engaged to anybody—and Stella was right,—she couldn't marry me. (*STELLA winces.*) It was you I wanted all the time. Aw, Caroline, be a sport. (*He turns her to him*) I love you . . . you know I love you—— (*He takes CAROLINE'S hand and slips the ring on her finger. She looks into his eyes and suddenly breaks into uncontrolled sobbing. He puts his arms around her and she continues to cry her heart out on his bosom.*)

STELLA. (*With a great sigh of relief*) Thank God, that's all right.

(*SENATOR RISDALE and WENDHAM following enter U.U.R. SENATOR will come in D.L. of C. chair and cross to STELLA. WENDHAM will follow in and come to C.L.*)

STANLEY. Caroline, let's go out in the garden.

CAROLINE. Yeah, let's go.

SENATOR RISDALE. (*Stepping out of arch*) Here, what's going on here? (*Crossing down; sees STELLA*) How do you do, Mrs. Amaranth? (*Crossing to shake hands.*)

WENDHAM. (*Has followed in close behind*) Hello, Stella. (*STELLA motions to them not to interrupt. SENATOR RISDALE to STELLA with his hand out. They shake a greeting, and then the SENATOR turns into the scene.*) Carrie, dear, what is it?

STANLEY. It's all right. Everything is all right. Isn't it, Caroline?

CAROLINE. (*Looking up with a tearful smile. Crosses to WENDHAM L.C.*) Yes.—Don't mind me, Father. I'm just crying because—because I'm so happy. (*She buries her head on WENDHAM'S bosom.*)

WENDHAM. (*Incredulously*) Stanley . . . is it?

STANLEY. Yes, sir.—Let her alone. (*Takes her away from WENDHAM*) Come here. (*Crushes her in his arms*) We're engaged!

SENATOR RISDALE. What, again?

STANLEY. Yep!

WENDHAM. Thank the Lord. (*Eases U.L.*)

SENATOR RISDALE. (*Looking quizzically at STELLA*) Your doings?

STELLA. I did my damndest!

SENATOR RISDALE. (*Gruffly but sincerely with a little bow*) Thank you. (*WENDHAM turns into the scene.*)

CAROLINE. It's my own fault. I've been horrid, stupid!

STANLEY. No, you haven't. I'm the one that's got the temper. I get it from my father!

SENATOR RISDALE. A—er—wha——

CAROLINE. No, no, I won't have you say that— (*Ad lib.*)

SENATOR RISDALE. You two might continue your self-reproaches somewhere else. There's a very satisfactory moon outside——

STANLEY. (*He starts CAROLINE out by the hand in a hurry*) All right. Let's go. (*U.C.*)

WENDHAM. Don't keep her out too late, Stanley. (*DOOR Bell.*)

STANLEY. (*U.R.C.*) Aw, we know our business. Come on. (*They both exit U.R.*)

SENATOR RISDALE. (*After watching CAROLINE and STANLEY exit, then to STELLA brusquely, but with ill-concealed eagerness crosses B. to her*) Now, Mrs. Amaranth, what's your news? Let's have it. We're all ears.

STELLA. Just what do you want me to tell you?

SENATOR RISDALE. (*In exasperated surprise*) Good God!—You know very well what we want to know!

STELLA. You'd like to find out if the Governor is going to sign the State Park Bill?

SENATOR RISDALE. Naturally . . .

STELLA. Well—I don't know.

SENATOR RISDALE. You don't *know*? ? ? ?

STELLA. No.—I can't guarantee what a contemptible specimen like Horace Ogilvie is going to do until after he does it. But have a little patience. At ten o'clock he will broadcast his decision—then everybody will know.

SENATOR RISDALE. But say, look here! What's the object in keeping us on tenter-hooks?

WENDHAM. (U.L.C.) Can't you tell us what happened, Stella?

STELLA. I don't think I shall ever tell anybody what happened.

SENATOR RISDALE. You're stalling, for some reason or other. If I thought you had double-crossed us—— But damn it, you haven't—I know better. You are not that kind of a woman—— (*Doorbell rings. With a start, showing his nervousness, crosses to WENDHAM*) Who the devil can that be at this hour of night?

WENDHAM. I'll see. (*Exits through arch and off L.*)

SENATOR RISDALE. Gad! I'm as nervous as a cat. (*Crossing back to R.C.O.*) Let me ask you, do you get any pleasure out of torturing me like this? You've been away four days—not a word—you know what's at stake and still——

WENDHAM. (*Re-enters. Goes to c. of arch. The CHETSWOLDS come in*) It's Mr. and Mrs. Chetswold . . . !

SENATOR RISDALE. (*Angrily*) Oh, hell! (*Sees them, acknowledges their presence, goes U.R. and looks off in garden. MRS. CHETSWOLD goes D.L. REVEREND, following her in, goes D.C.*)

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Good evening——

REV. CHETSWOLD. Good evening, all.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. How do you do, Mrs. Amaranth? We just heard you had returned. (WENDHAM *has arrived* D.L., *left of* MRS. CHETSWOLD.)

REV. CHETSWOLD. And we came right over!

STELLA. Very attentive of you, I'm sure.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Not at all. We are here for strictly business reasons.

REV. CHETSWOLD. Agatha!—Please—be kind!

STELLA. (*A step to* REVEREND) You mustn't ask the impossible of your wife, Dr. Chetswold. Since this is a business call, madam, come to the point. What do you want?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. What do I want! What have you done about our investment?

STELLA. I have no information to give you at present. Sorry!

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*With a hysterical gasp*) Herbert, she has failed!

REV. CHETSWOLD. (*In blank dismay*) Oh, no, no, *no!* She couldn't fail! It's impossible!

SENATOR RISDALE. (*Comes D. from U.R. and crosses in L.*) Damn it, Mrs. Amaranth, why don't you answer her? What do you mean by playing fast and loose with us like this? Can't you come out with the truth?

STELLA. I'd rather not say anything just now.

SENATOR RISDALE. Why?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Because she's ashamed to—*that's why!* You've been taken down a peg or two. I can read defeat in every line of your face!

STELLA. Oh, can you?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. But I shall not leave this house until I hear the full particulars!

STELLA. (*After glaring at MRS. CHETSWOLD for a moment; squaring her shoulders. Then to* SENATOR RISDALE) Senator Risdale, I felt sure that ordinary decency would allow you to judge my trip

to the Capital by results, but since I was wrong,—how am I to answer this person?

MRS. CHETSWOLD. By giving us the full details!

SENATOR RISDALE. I think that would be the wisest course, Mrs. Amaranth.

STELLA. Very well, then.—When I reached the Capital I engaged a suite at Madam Frascati's place—it's a small and most exclusive private hotel; and very discreetly conducted—chiefly, I understand, for the benefit of our prominent legislators, for—er—very private conferences . . .

REV. CHETSWOLD. How interesting . . . a cosy place?

STELLA. Very. You ought to try it some time, Doctor. It would be a pleasant change for you.—Well, I communicated with the Governor and he met me at Frascati's shortly before midnight, on Monday! We had some wine, and got to talking over old times—everything was awfully jolly, until I led up to the State Park Bill. Then he grew suspicious at once—and from what he said, I knew I had lost—(*General bus. STELLA speaks with head bowed. They all wait on her words.*) So I had to resort to other tactics—but I know you will be relieved to hear that next morning, at breakfast—the dear Governor gave me his solemn promise that he would sign the bill, for my sake. (*They all register on it. Then MRS. CHETSWOLD speaks.*)

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Well!—That is a brazen confession, I must say!

STELLA. Brazen, perhaps—but you were thirsting for particulars; and after all, it proves beyond argument that *you* are a damned poor judge of what men find attractive in a woman— (*And after a pause*) And now, since you have forced out of me what I would rather have kept to myself, you'll excuse me, won't you?

SENATOR RISDALE. Certainly.

STELLA. Thank you. (*Goes to SENATOR RISDALE*) This has all been most embarrassing to me, I assure you. (*Moves slowly towards the stairs.*)

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*As STELLA starts up*) Herbert, Herbert, if she's speaking the truth, we are saved!

STELLA. (*Has reached the stairs. She bursts into a mocking laugh, stops and turns into scene. Still laughing, she reads*) Don't crow too soon, Mrs. Chetswold. Wait until you know all. I forgot to mention that there's a *joker*—

MRS. CHETSWOLD. A *joker*!!!

STELLA. Yes;—or a fly in the ointment—and I do hope, my good woman, that you haven't a weak heart—because you are going to get a shock!!! (*WENDHAM looks to SENATOR RISDALE. SENATOR looks to WENDHAM. Then STELLA very sweetly*) Good evening . . . (*Goes up the stairs. Exit. All hold and watch her off. REVEREND turns, worried, to front. MRS. CHETSWOLD crosses to SENATOR.*)

MRS. CHETSWOLD. What do you suppose she meant by that?

SENATOR RISDALE. I dunno.—We'll find out soon enough.—John, will you have Emma go out and bring those youngsters in? (*WENDHAM goes to button L. side of arch. Rings. SENATOR pacing up and down stage R.*) If Ogilvie means to sign that bill, I can't see what she could have done to cross us!

MRS. CHETSWOLD. We were fools to trust her. You mark my words, Senator Risdale, she is smarter than you are. (*EMMA starts in U.U.R. MRS. CHETSWOLD sits C.*)

SENATOR RISDALE. That remains to be seen, Madam. (*EMMA is in the arch.*) Did you want me, sir?

WENDHAM. Miss Caroline and Stanley are out in the garden somewhere; in the arbor, probably. Tell them we are waiting for them.

EMMA. Very good, sir. (*Exit U.U.R.*)

REV. CHETSWOLD. I feel quite nervous. I shall be on pins and needles until I hear the glad tidings from the Governor's own lips. Not that I doubt Mrs. Amaranth's word.—Oh, no! I'm sure she is the soul of honor!

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Honor!—She is a scarlet woman, by her own confession!

SENATOR RISDALE. Cut out that line of talk, Mrs. Chetswold.

WENDHAM. Yes.—It strikes me that none of us is in a position to throw stones.

REV. CHETSWOLD. No. Tolerance, Agatha,—tolerance!

(*STANLEY and CAROLINE enter from garden U.R. They blink as they come from the dark into the lighted room. It is apparent that their reconciliation is complete.*)

STANLEY. Hullo . . . Are we late?

SENATOR RISDALE. (*Looks at his watch*) No. Get busy, son, and get me Station W.E.L. I want to hear the Governor's speech. (*All sit in easy position to where standing CAROLINE D.R.*)

STANLEY. Sure. (*Goes to radio U.R.; manipulates the knobs. All wait tensely. Presently a singing voice rings out. The SENATOR jumps up nervously.*)

SENATOR RISDALE. My God, what was that?

STANLEY. Ha, ha, my mistake. That was Kansas City.

SENATOR RISDALE. (*Sits*) I can readily believe it.

WENDHAM. Just . . . (*STANLEY working at radio and the voice of the announcer is heard.*)

ANNOUNCER. Ladies and gentlemen of the radio audience, this is Station W.E.L. broadcasting this

evening Governor Ogilvie's decision on the proposed State Park. This is J. J. C. announcing. The next voice you hear will be that of the Governor. . . . Stand by, please . . .

GOVERNOR OGILVIE. Friends and fellow citizens: Tonight over the boundless ether I send forth my message to you, in order that every interested member of our glorious commonwealth may be apprised immediately of my decision in regard to the proposed State Park. (*Pause.*) I feel that any plan to conserve the natural beauties of our fair State is to be encouraged; it must rise like the eagle above all political animosities. The voice of the multitude has reached my ears—the cry of countless parents calling upon me to provide health and recreation in the great open spaces for their cherished little ones has reached my heart and steeled my pen against dissuasion. I bid them now be of good cheer,—for I have signed the State Park Bill!

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*With hysterical joy*) He's signed it . . . Herbert, we're rich!

SENATOR RISDALE. Quiet, please.

ALL. Shhhh!

GOVERNOR OGILVIE. Too often, alas, proposals of this kind have provided unprincipled scoundrels with opportunities for graft.—But there will be *no* graft this time! Proudly I proclaim that the patriotic holders of land in the Kiwanis Valley have generously offered to sell it to the State at cost—plus ten per cent, to cover interest and carrying charges. Oh, my fellow citizens, it brings tears to . . . (*The SENATOR leaps to his feet.*)

SENATOR RISDALE. (*Gruffly*) Shut the damn thing off—I don't want to hear any more. (*To WENDHAM*) So that was the game—she's sold us out!

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*With shrill rage*) Sold our land at cost . . . Oh!—the unspeakable wretch!

REV. CHETSWOLD. Do you suppose that is what she meant by the joker?

SENATOR RISDALE. Yeah.—Well, we'll see about this!—Caroline, go up and tell Mrs. Amaranth I want to see her down here right away. (CAROLINE *exits over the stairs.*)

MRS. CHETSWOLD. She's robbed us of our profit! But I'll get even with her! The strumpet!

REV. CHETSWOLD. Agatha!—Such language, really!

SENATOR RISDALE. Reverend, your wife is over-excited. You'd better take her home.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Home?—Oh, no. I demand a personal explanation from Mrs. Amaranth, and I shan't stir one step till I see her.

SENATOR RISDALE. Let me inform *you*, madam, that I am in no mood to listen to any more cat fights between you two women.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. I don't care what mood you're in—— (Comes D. a step to do battle.) So you're standing up for her, too?

REV. CHETSWOLD. Agatha, a little Christian charity might not be amiss.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. It is not necessary to remind me of my duties as a Christian, Doctor Chetswold.

REV. CHETSWOLD. I really think it is, Agatha. Let me remind you also that Mrs. Amaranth has done us both a very great service—and, in my mind, she will always be enthroned as a noble and self-sacrificing woman——

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Have you taken leave of your senses?

REV. CHETSWOLD. No.—I think I am quite sane, my dear.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. Oh, keep quiet, do!

REV. CHETSWOLD. No . . . I will *not* keep quiet. I have been compelled to do so ever since the day I



"THE SHELF"

married you. You have bullied me so consistently that I have been afraid to open my mouth in my own home. Luckily, I have found an outlet for my natural eloquence in the pulpit, the one sanctuary where you *couldn't* make me shut up! But from now on I shall assume my place as the head of my house.—I will no longer tolerate your tyranny nor your narrow, un-Christian views——

MRS. CHETSWOLD. And do you think you can control *me*?

REV. CHETSWOLD. (*Mildly*) Yes, Agatha, I think I can. If you drive me too far, I shall let the social circle know that you are obliged to use a hair remover to discourage an incipient moustache!

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Outraged*) Oh!——

REV. CHETSWOLD. And there is other information of a personal nature that I shall not hesitate to disclose, if you don't come home at once!

MRS. CHETSWOLD. You shall *pay* for these insults, Herbert Chetswold!

REV. CHETSWOLD. I don't doubt it in the least, my dear.

MRS. CHETSWOLD. And rest assured that Mrs. Amaranth has not heard the last of this either!

REV. CHETSWOLD. (*In desperate earnest*) Agatha, I warn you, if you attempt to annoy or to villify that lady, I shall tell every member of this parish that before we were married——

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Ready to burst with anger and humiliation*) Oh!—Ohooooooooooooo! You unspeakable wretch! (*She sweeps out through the hall, arms in air.*)

REV. CHETSWOLD. (*Addressing them all apologetically. This line to WENDHAM*) I beg your pardon sincerely for this outburst——

WENDHAM. It's quite all right.

REV. CHETSWOLD. Shocking bad taste; but it had to be done.

STANLEY. You're a good old sport, after all, Reverend.

REV. CHETSWOLD. Thank you. It is my ambition to be . . . er . . . I sometimes think that if I were single again I could be quite human——

MRS. CHETSWOLD. (*Off stage L. in arch*) Herbert Chetswold!—Are you coming, or are you *not*?

REV. CHETSWOLD. Yes . . . yes, my love. (*He starts off, now crushed, then he turns, his voice quivering with apprehension*) I ask your prayers. (*He exits L. in arch.*)

SENATOR RISDALE. Go up and see what's keeping Mrs. Amaranth.

(*Phone rings. STANLEY follows the REVEREND off.*

SENATOR *pacing up and across stage, first to U.R., then to D.R., then to U.R., then D.R., and as he is D.R., WENDHAM, who has answered the phone, has discovered that the SENATOR is wanted.*)

WENDHAM. (*Crosses to phone as it rings*) Hello. Yes, oh, yes, Foster.—The Senator is right here. Just a moment. (*To SENATOR, D.R.C.*) It's your secretary.

SENATOR RISDALE. (*Crossing to phone with a growl*) What the devil is he bothering me about this hour of the night?

WENDHAM. (*Giving phone to SENATOR, goes U. and sits C.*) He says it's important.

SENATOR RISDALE. Humph! (*Speaking into phone*) Hullo, Foster. Whatchyerwant? Oh, you have, hey?—Did you decipher it?—Hmmm—No. I can't get away now.—Is it all right to read it to me?—Go ahead, then—shoot. (*He listens with grim attention*) Okay, Foster. Thanks. No,—let him wait. I'll answer it when I get home.—Be back in an hour.—Yeah. G'bye. (*Hangs up receiver and*

turns with a sardonic smile) Code telegram from our noble Governor.

WENDHAM. The deuce you say!—What does he want?

SENATOR RISDALE. Asks me to come to the Capital for a conference, tomorrow.

WENDHAM. What's his object, do you suppose?

SENATOR RISDALE. He says he wants to bury the hatchet.

WENDHAM. You're going, aren't you?

SENATOR RISDALE. Not so's you can notice it.

WENDHAM. Is that good politics at this juncture?

SENATOR RISDALE. Sure it is.—I know by the tone of that telegram that something has frightened him. I'd bet you my last dollar that somehow, some way, Mrs. Amaranth managed to put the fear of God into him.

WENDHAM. How do you figure that out?

SENATOR RISDALE. It's a hunch.—There's more back of this than that foxy lady let on.—But don't worry. I'll wring it out of her when I get her alone.

WENDHAM. *(Rise)* I hope you'll wring out of her why in thunder she sold our land at cost.

SENATOR RISDALE. That's easy. She turned our grab into an honest deal. Altruism, Wendham.

WENDHAM. *(Irritably)* Yes, damn it all—altruism at our expense! *(Crosses U.L.)*

SENATOR RISDALE. Oh, well, what's the good of hollering?

WENDHAM. *(Curiously looking at the SENATOR)* You take it pretty coolly, I must say.—It isn't like you to be quite so philosophical. *(D. to SENATOR, who is now C.)* Do you realize that she's gyped us out of a fortune?

SENATOR RISDALE. *(Placidly)* She thinks she has!

WENDHAM. Didn't you tell her what we paid?

SENATOR RISDALE. I told her we paid in the neighborhood of a million and a half for the whole shootin' match;—and she took my word for it.

WENDHAM. You lied to her, then?

SENATOR RISDALE. Naturally! How the devil is she going to find out that we got it for less than six hundred thousand?

WENDHAM. But what about Ogilvie?

SENATOR RISDALE. When Ogilvie signed that bill he put *me* back in the saddle again, and he knows it. Now listen—we get a million and a half for our holdings *plus* ten per cent. Half of the ten per cent, seventy-five thousand dollars, goes to Mrs. Amaranth. The Chetswolds get eleven thousand dollars. That leaves a nice little profit of pretty near a million to whack up between you and me and Stanley.—Cheer up! Things might be worse!

WENDHAM. Senator . . . you're a wonder.

SENATOR RISDALE. (*Dryly*) Yeah. I've known that for a long time. (*Crossing D.L.*)

(*STELLA has entered over stairs; goes to table U.L. She has changed to a smart-looking tailored frock and carries a hat and hand bag which she places on the table U.L. She looks freshened and rested. If she carries a coat it will be placed on chair U.L.*)

STELLA. (*Coming in. The SENATOR sees her and crosses to D.L.*) Sorry to have kept you waiting.—I was packing.

SENATOR RISDALE. (*D.L.*) Packing?—What for?

STELLA. I'm leaving.

SENATOR RISDALE. Leaving?

STELLA. Yes.—The midnight train for New York.

SENATOR RISDALE. For how long?

STELLA. For ever and ever and ev——

WENDHAM. Stella!—You don't mean that!

STELLA. (*Coming in to c.*) Oh, yes, I do.—The *Berengaria* sails next Wednesday—and God willing, I sail with her.

WENDHAM. But why are you running away?—I thought—that is, you led us to believe—that you and Ogilvie—

STELLA. Don't be absurd, John.—Surely you didn't imagine that affair was going to continue?

WENDHAM. Why—I didn't know.

STELLA. Well, you do now. Your money is safe. (*To SENATOR*) Your bill is signed—so I am off to Europe to spend my declining years and my ill-gotten gains.—And by the way—I shall need some money on account— (*Has crossed in and is now R. of c. chair*) Traveling expenses, you know.

WENDHAM. Certainly. How much?

STELLA. A mere trifle.—Five thousand will do for a starter.

WENDHAM. (*Embarrassed*) I—er—I don't think I have that much in the bank.

SENATOR RISDALE. (*Gruffly*) It's all right—let her have what she wants—make out the check now, —John— (*Waves WENDHAM toward arch significantly*) And—er—you might just take your time about it. (*WENDHAM goes U.C.*)

WENDHAM. I see— Very well. (*Exit U.U.R.*)

SENATOR RISDALE. (*Bringing his arm high above his head with finger pointing, brings it to lowered to direct c. chair*) Sit down . . .

STELLA. (*Doing so*) . . . said the Senator, preparing to rake her over the coals. (*Sitting c.*) But do make it brief, Senator dear.

SENATOR RISDALE. Why should I rake you over the coals?

STELLA. For check-mating your raid on the State Treasury.

SENATOR RISDALE. Well, let's admit I am disap-

pointed.—Even so—you got me out of a bad fix—so I'm disposed to be magnanimous.

STELLA. That's a relief!—and after all, I made an honest man of you.

SENATOR RISDALE. So you did!—By ginks, I presume I ought to be grateful to you.

STELLA. Yes.—If you stop to think that in reforming you I was forced to sully myself!

SENATOR RISDALE. Tut, tut, Mrs. Amaranth—why keep it up?

STELLA. Keep what up?

SENATOR RISDALE. My dear lady, I thought I had you sized up pretty well; but this evening you amazed me.—My hat is off to you, Mrs. Amaranth. You've got me simply paralyzed with admiration!

STELLA. Indeed?—Why?

SENATOR RISDALE. Because right here in this room tonight you proved yourself to be the damndest liar I have ever met!

STELLA. You're insulting!

SENATOR RISDALE. No . . . That's not an insult . . . It's a *tribute*!—Come on, now—come across!

STELLA. I don't know what you are talking about.

SENATOR RISDALE. Standing pat, eh? All right—I'll call you. (*Takes the chair R. of U.L. table, deliberately places at advantage point, L. of STELLA, then he sits on it.*) What the deuce possessed you to stand up in front of that Chetswold woman and blacken your own reputation with a yarn that was a lie from start to finish?

STELLA. (*Indignant*) How can you assert my story was a lie?

SENATOR RISDALE. Because I know blamed well it is.

STELLA. The Governor signed your bill, didn't he?

SENATOR RISDALE. And I want to know how you made him do it.

STELLA. I have already explained.

SENATOR RISDALE. Oh, no, you haven't.—Now look here—from the moment you set foot in the Capital, I had you watched!

STELLA. *What? ?—er—well*, what did you find out?

SENATOR RISDALE. Governor Ogilvie called on you in the afternoon—*not at midnight*—and he remained for less than an hour. *Now!* What was your object in telling such a whopper?

STELLA. (*After a thoughtful pause*) I had a woman's reason. You wouldn't understand.

SENATOR RISDALE. Well, gimme a chance.—Let's hear it.

STELLA. I'd rather not. You see, it's humiliating to me.

SENATOR RISDALE. Can't be more humiliating than the yarn you told.

STELLA. Oh, but it is.

SENATOR RISDALE. Come on. Take me into your confidence.

STELLA. (*Hesitating*) You'll never tell—anybody?

SENATOR RISDALE. Cross my heart.

STELLA. (*Breaks into a sob*) That damn Chetswold woman said I was *passée*—on the shelf.

SENATOR RISDALE. I know.—Who the hell cares what she says?

STELLA. I cared;—very much. All my life, Senator, I have been used to admiration. Men have always sought me, danced attendance on me and flattered me—and—well—I liked it. Vanity, I suppose—but after all, it is a comfort to imagine oneself pretty and—*nice*.

SENATOR RISDALE. Well, so you are.

STELLA. No. Very chivalrous of you to say so;

but I'm not fooling myself any more. I am on the shelf, *done for, a has been!*

SENATOR RISDALE. Poppycock!—Why do you say that?

STELLA. Senator, I went to the Capital out of sheer bravado. I was so sure that Horace would try to make love to me;—I went armed for a siege. I had braced myself to resist all his amorous advances.—Well, I needn't have bothered. My dear Senator, for nearly an hour, that man sat in my private suite, and in all that time the brute never even offered to hold my hand!

SENATOR RISDALE. (*Indignantly*) He's a fish.

STELLA. He's not a fish.—He likes the ladies—that's just it. But he treated me with all the courtesy and respect due to somebody's mother!

SENATOR RISDALE. Well, that's nothing to get insulted over, is it?

STELLA. Of course it is! Do you think any woman, not actually decrepit, wants to be treated like somebody's mother, when she is alone with a man?

SENATOR RISDALE. Er—yes.—No. I see the point.—But what's the odds? Suppose he had been a bit warmer in his attentions? You hadn't the slightest idea of—er—a—yielding to him, had you?

STELLA. (*Indignantly*) Certainly not! How dare you even suggest such a thing. (*Then with a tear*) But he might at least have been gentleman enough to ask me!! (*The SENATOR chuckles with amusement. STELLA severely*) It's no laughing matter, Senator Risdale.

SENATOR RISDALE. (*Sobering*) No—of course not.—And you mean to say that you would prefer to have Mrs. Chetswold believe that you are that man's mistress rather than let her know he turned you down cold?

STELLA. (*Handkerchief to nose, crying, nodding*

yes) Yes—a thousand times. Any woman would!

SENATOR RISDALE. Well, I'll be Go—— Well, feminine logic is too much for me.

STELLA. That's because you're nothing but a man. There isn't a woman in the world who wouldn't understand and sympathize with my position!

SENATOR RISDALE. Well—maybe. But go on.

STELLA. Well, I saw myself failing. I was so furious I could have murdered him. I said the first thing that came into my head.—It must have been good, because it worked.

SENATOR RISDALE. Let's hear it.

STELLA. I told him I had come to warn him you had set a trap for him—and that I knew you had proof that he was deep in a conspiracy with the interests!

SENATOR RISDALE. . . . er—what interests?

STELLA. How should I know?

SENATOR RISDALE. (*Chuckling*) What else did you say?

STELLA. I said if he didn't sign the State Park Bill, you were going to expose him, just before the nomination!!

SENATOR RISDALE. And how did the gentleman take that?

STELLA. Turned sort of green and trembled.

SENATOR RISDALE. (*Excitedly*) By God, Mrs. Amaranth! I believe you've stumbled on something. The interests, eh?—Go on.

STELLA. Then he blustered something about the State Park Bill being a brazen steal. But I told him you didn't own one acre of the land in your own name; that I held it and I was willing to let the State have it for cost.

SENATOR RISDALE. That staggered him, didn't it?

STELLA. It seemed to. I said if he didn't sign

the bill, the newspapers would be told of my offer, and everybody would say he cheated the people out of the Park, to let the interests have the land for private purposes.

SENATOR RISDALE. (*A great light dawning*)
Hah! . . . The Kiwanis Valley watershed!—So it's the Electric *Power gang*!!

STELLA. And now you know it all.

SENATOR RISDALE. (*Rises and with his mailed fist raised in air he gets another thought and sits*)
No.—Wait a minute.—How did you explain you and me being tied up together in this affair?

STELLA. (*Reluctant to tell*) Must you know that?

SENATOR RISDALE. Yes.

STELLA. Well,—I led him to believe that you, as a man, were not altogether indifferent to my charms as a woman!

SENATOR RISDALE. Eh?—How in thunder did you come to say that?

STELLA. To get even with him—since he didn't want me, I just let him know that someone much more important *did*.—I lied brazenly.

SENATOR RISDALE. Ummm—well, it so happens that for once in your life you managed to tell the truth. I—as a man—am not at all indifferent to your attractions—as a woman!

STELLA. Please don't be ridiculous.

SENATOR RISDALE. What's ridiculous about it? I guess I've been sort of beaddled over you all along. I've been asleep.

STELLA. And when did you wake up?

SENATOR RISDALE. Tonight—when you said you were going away to Europe forever. Don't you do it, Stella.—Stay here where you belong and marry me.

STELLA. Stop joking.

SENATOR RISDALE. I'm *not* joking. We'll get

married tomorrow if you say so. Gad!—What a wife you'd make for a politician!—Why, damn it, you've got everything!—Beauty, class, poise, brains—and the best liar in the world. (*STELLA likes what he is saying, so he goes on*) You ought to be an Ambassador's wife. Diplomacy's your game. You just marry me and I'll get an ambassadorship. (*Rise out of his chair. The SENATOR again taking the floor. With arm he puts the chair out of his way and the other goes up above his head with a force.*) They've got to give me anything I ask for!—Can't you see yourself glittering in a foreign court? (*Leaning over to her*) What do you say?

STELLA. I really like you a lot, Senator.

SENATOR RISDALE. Then what's to prevent—

STELLA. The fact that you are such an unprincipaled scamp. Dishonest, through and through!

SENATOR RISDALE. (*His hands on hips in a pose upbraiding her*) Now where's your consistency! Just now you were bragging that you had made an honest man of me; and so you have.—I admit it. Damn it!—and now——

STELLA. I'm afraid you won't stay honest.

SENATOR RISDALE. (*Crossing to her and his hand on her chair*) You may be right—but you just stick around and see to it yourself.

STELLA. (*Rise*) No, thank you. You are a good deal of a dear, Senator;—and it's rather a wrench to part with you, but all the same, my answer is positively and finally *no*.

SENATOR RISDALE. (*A step to her*) Now, Mrs. Amaranth——

STELLA. Senator, if you tell me Stanley needs a mother, I'll never speak to you again.

SENATOR RISDALE. That's the best you can do?

STELLA. Yes.

SENATOR RISDALE. (*Crosses to sit in chair U.R.*) I'm damned sorry.

STELLA. You'll get over it.

(Enter EMMA in arch L.)

EMMA. The taxicab is here, Mrs. Amaranth.

STELLA. *(Going U.S.)* Have the man bring down my trunk, please, Emma—and will you ask Stanley to help with my hand luggage?

EMMA. Yes, ma'am. *(Exit upstairs.)*

STELLA. *(D.L. of c. chair)* Why so crestfallen, Senator?

SENATOR RISDALE. I'm afraid I won't stay honest.

STELLA. *(Laughs)* I couldn't think of marrying you, although it's almost worth sacrificing my prejudices to see Mrs. Chetswold's face when she hears the news, and you don't know how much your asking me has cheered me up. I feel quite ten years younger.

SENATOR RISDALE. Mmm. Glad I was able to do even that much for you.

STELLA. You've done a lot; really—*(Crossing to him)*—and you deserve a reward. *(Places her hand on his chin, raises it—kisses him)* There!

SENATOR RISDALE. *(Gleefully)* Um. Much obliged. I feel sort of rejuvenated myself, after that.

(WENDHAM enters U.U.R. with check in hand.)

WENDHAM. *(Coming in L. of c. chair)* There you are, Stella. *(Hands her the check.)*

STELLA. *(Over to him; takes it)* Thanks, John.

WENDHAM. *(Crossing D.L.)* I feel terribly guilty about this whole affair.

(CAROLINE and STANLEY enter over stairs. STANLEY with bags.)

STELLA. You needn't—I have come out of it with flying colors and some very necessary cash.

(EMMA is now preceding the taxi driver carrying STELLA'S trunk on his back down the stairs and off through arch L.)

EMMA. Watch out you don't scrape them there banisters. (*Taxi driver exits with trunk.*)

STELLA. There goes my trunk. I must fly. (*Putting on her hat*) Caroline darling, I warn you that I am going to kiss your fiance good-bye. (*She goes to STANLEY, who is D.L., and kisses him.*)

EMMA. (*Up in arch c., getting impatient*) Hurry up, Mrs. Amaranth.

CAROLINE. (E.C.) I'm awfully sorry about everything, Aunt Stella.

STELLA. Quite all right.

EMMA. Mrs. Amaranth.

STELLA. Yes, Emma; I'm coming . . . (*To WENDHAM D.L.*) Good-bye, John.

WENDHAM. Good-bye, Stella. (*Goes up and exit U.C.*)

STELLA. Stanley, my dear boy!

STANLEY. Good-bye, Stella. (*Starts out and off U.C., carrying hand baggage.*)

STELLA. (*Crosses to CAROLINE c.*) Good-bye, Caroline. (*Kisses her. CAROLINE goes up c. and off.*)

EMMA. (*Getting terribly impatient waiting*) Are you going to hurry, Mrs. Amaranth? You'll miss that train.

STELLA. Yes, yes, I'm coming. (*Starts out U.C. So EMMA goes out U.L. They have all gone except SENATOR, who stands stock still D.R., regarding STELLA wistfully.*)

STELLA. (*Turning*) Aren't you coming, Senator?

SENATOR RISDALE. No. No, thanks. I'll stay right here if you don't mind.

STELLA. (*Coming D. to him, holds out her hand and smiles uncertainly*) Well . . . good-bye, then—

SENATOR RISDALE. I won't say it. (*Puts out his hand and shakes hers*) Make it au revoir——

STELLA. That sounds ominous!

SENATOR RISDALE. I usually get what I go after—

STELLA. Even when you aim as high as an ambassadorship?

SENATOR RISDALE. Oh, Stella, you should see me in knickerbockers . . . !

STELLA. Well, good luck to you, you dear old bull dog; and au revoir, since you prefer it . . . My word, I must fly. I'll just make my train by the skin of my teeth—as I always do. Be good, Senator—if you can——

EMMA. (*Rushing on from L. in arch*) Mrs. Amaranth, for God's sake, are you coming?

STELLA. (*Going U.*) Yes, yes, Emma.

EMMA. You've got the only taxicab in the town and you're holding it here waiting like there was plenty.

(*STELLA is now out and EMMA has talked herself off stage. STELLA has hurried out to the others. There are heard chattering farewells in the outer hall. The SENATOR stands for a moment, thoughtfully gazing after STELLA. Then he rushes over to the telephone.*)

SENATOR RISDALE. (*Into the phone*) Hullo.—Gimme Kiwanis 5400—— Um—hummm—that you, Foster? Engage a suite for me on the *Beren-garia*, sailing next Wednesday. (*CAROLINE and STANLEY appear in the arch.*) A suite, I said, not a stateroom. I want the best they've got. All right. That's better. Good-bye.

(CAROLINE and STANLEY come D.L. STANLEY L. of CAROLINE. SENATOR hangs up receiver, rubs his hands together and all in a smile he starts, head down, crossing to c., then at c. he raises and sees them.)

SENATOR RISDALE. (*A bit sheepishly*) Oh . . . hullooooo. Didn't see you around.—Stella gone? (*He opens his arms. CAROLINE comes into them.*)

CAROLINE. Yes.

STANLEY. Are you going to Europe, Dad?

SENATOR RISDALE. Yeah.—Um—hummmmm—next Wednesday.

STANLEY. What for?

SENATOR RISDALE. (*With a slow smile*) Well, son, I can't say definitely now, but I hope—That is, I've got a good, healthy hunch I'm going on my honeymoon.

STANLEY. (*Collapsing into chair in stunned amazement*) Brrrr! Hummmmm— Young fellah, are you sure you weren't bamboozled into this!

(*The SENATOR laughs and they all laugh and—*)

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